

Tire safety program best practices



Subpar tires are a frequent contributor to truck accidents. Truck tire blowouts often result in loss-of-control accidents or rollovers. Inadequate tread is a factor in many loss-of-control accidents during inclement weather. Inadequate tread decreases the ability to stop, increasing the likelihood of rear-ending another vehicle in an emergency stopping situation. Substandard tires are also easily identified by law enforcement personnel and account for a large percentage of roadside violations. Organizations should implement a formal tire safety program to minimize accidents and stay in compliance with safety regulations.



Tire inspections and maintenance are critical to fleet safety

Key tire regulations

Part 393.75 of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) outlines specific guidelines and standards in regard to tires.

Part 393.75(a) states that no motor vehicle shall be operated on any tire that:

- Has body ply or belt material exposed through the tread or sidewall
- Has any tread or sidewall separation
- Is flat or has an audible leak
- Has a cut to the extent that the ply or belt material is exposed

Part 393.75 goes on to state that:

- Front steer tires must have at least 4/32 of an inch tread groove pattern depth, and rear drive tires and trailer tires must have at least 2/32 of an inch tread groove pattern depth when measured at any point on a major tread groove
- regrooved tires, with a load-carrying capacity equal to or greater than 2,232 kilograms (4,920 pounds), are not allowed on the front wheels of any truck or truck tractor

Tire program best practices

1. **Develop a realistic annual budget for tire replacement and repair.** Enough money should be budgeted each year to ensure that tires can be maintained and replaced as needed.
2. **Create a formal tire inspection and maintenance policy.** The policy should:
 - a. Establish inspection and service intervals for tires by maintenance personnel
 - b. Require daily driver pre- and post-trip inspections of tires
 - c. Outline the tire inspection process, and establish criteria for tire replacement; requirements established in Part 393.75 should be minimum criteria
 - d. Establish procedures to guide drivers with tire issues on the road
3. **Replace steer tires before required to improve handling.** These tires can be moved to another axle position for their remaining life.

4. **Train drivers and maintenance personnel** on the proper procedure for tire inspection. The training should take place during orientation and at least annually thereafter. Don't assume experienced personnel know how to properly inspect tires. Training should include what to look for in regard to tire damage, what is needed to comply with Part 393.75, how to properly check tire pressure, and how to report problems and arrange repairs. All training should be documented.
5. **Provide adequate tools for drivers.** All drivers should be provided with:
 - a. A commercial-grade tire pressure gauge
 - b. A tool for measuring tread depth
 - c. A list of phone numbers outlining who to contact in the event a bad tire is identified
- d. Air hoses — many organizations are providing these hoses, which hook to the truck's air and make it possible for drivers to add air to their tires when pressures are low
6. **Audit the performance of the tires in your fleet.** Random checks on tire pressure and tire condition should be conducted to ensure that drivers are following the program as outlined.
7. **Hold drivers and maintenance personnel accountable.** If maintenance personnel identify a tire issue or a driver is cited for a tire violation that should have been identified by a driver during a pre- or post-trip inspection, the situation should be addressed with the driver. Likewise, maintenance personnel need to be held accountable for tire issues they miss during the inspection and maintenance process.

Tire violations significantly impact an organization's DOT vehicle maintenance Safety Measurement System (SMS) percentile.

National tire programs

Many tire companies offer national tire programs. These programs often include discounts on tire purchases and roadside services. One of the many advantages of a national tire program is it helps reduce the risk of getting substandard or mismatching tires placed on a unit. This is important because mismatched tires may cause unusual wear patterns and reduce tire life.

Retread/recap considerations

Using retread or recapped tires can be a significant way to reduce tire costs. However, a best practice is to not use them on front steer tires. If retreads/recaps are used, they should be obtained from a reputable organization that uses certified technicians to do the retreading/recapping.

Part 375 prohibits use of regrooved, retreaded or recapped tires on the front wheels of buses.



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