

Tire safety best practices for drivers



Poor 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.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), “maintaining proper tire pressures, monitoring tire wear, being aware of vehicle load limits, avoiding road hazards and inspecting tires for cuts, slashes and other irregularities are the most important things a driver can do to avoid tire failure.”



Poor tires are easily identified by law enforcement personnel and make up a large percentage of roadside violations. Inspect tires on a pre- and post-trip basis.

The NHTSA suggests that properly maintaining tires can:

- Improve vehicle handling
- Help protect drivers from avoidable breakdowns and crashes
- Improve fuel economy and increase tire life

Drivers must be familiar with tire regulations and follow tire safety best practices to ensure their safety and the safety of others on the road.

Key tire regulations

Part 393.75 of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSR) 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 further states 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.

Tire best practices

Drivers play a critical role in regard to tire maintenance and safety. The actions of a driver can mean the difference between having a safe run and facing the consequences of tire failure. To help ensure that tires are in safe operating condition, the following best practices should be performed by drivers:

1. **Verify tire pressures daily.** Drivers should verify tire pressures each day before taking the unit on the road. Low air pressure is one of the main causes of blowouts and fires, along with other tire problems. Furthermore, tires inflated below the manufacturer's specification can result in an out-of-service violation. For a more accurate gauge, most tire manufacturers recommend checking air pressure when the tire is cold prior to starting a trip.



“Thumping” tires does not accurately measure tire pressure. Tire pressures should be measured using a commercial-grade tire pressure gauge.

2. **Check tire condition.** During pre- and post-trip inspections, tires should be thoroughly inspected. Items to look for are air leaks, uneven wear, tread or sidewall damage, or anything that seems out of the ordinary. All lug nuts should be securely in place, and rims should be free of cracks or other defects.
3. **Verify tread depth.** Using a depth gauge, tread depths should be measured regularly to ensure that tires meet the minimum FMCSA standards. All tires have a wear indicator, a raised spot between the tire treads. If the tread is even with the wear indicator, the tire should be replaced.
4. **Check between the dual tires.** This should be done to ensure that there is no hidden tire damage and to verify that nothing has become lodged between the tires. Also, make sure that tires are not rubbing together, which could result in an out-of-service violation.
5. **Report problems immediately.** If a tire defect is found, the problem should be reported immediately and the tire should be repaired or replaced. If the damaged tire is in violation of Part 393.75, rather than driving on the tire, it is better to have the repairs performed in a safe location by a road repair service.

Driver tire tools

All drivers should have:

- A commercial-grade tire pressure gauge.
- An air hose that can hook to the truck's air and makes it possible to add air to the tires when pressures are too low.
- A tool for measuring tread depth.
- A list of phone numbers outlining who to contact in the event a tire defect is identified.



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