What a State Trooper Looks for During a Commercial Vehicle Roadside Inspection

Safety Insights Series | 342 Enterprises

Roadside inspections are a routine part of commercial vehicle enforcement throughout the United States. Understanding how these inspections are conducted can help drivers remain prepared, professional, and compliant with federal regulations. Drawing from more than 27 years of commercial vehicle enforcement experience, this overview explains what typically occurs during a roadside inspection from the perspective of a state trooper.

Identifying a Safe Location for the Stop

Once a commercial motor vehicle has been identified for inspection, the trooper will select a safe location to conduct the stop. Experienced enforcement officers typically have enough knowledge of the area to predict a safe location where the vehicle can pull over without creating a hazard to other motorists. The goal is to have the commercial motor vehicle stop completely out of the travel lane and safely away from moving traffic whenever possible.

Initial Contact With the Driver

After the vehicle has safely stopped, the trooper will approach the vehicle and make contact with the driver. Depending on the situation and the trooper's preference, the approach may be made from either the passenger side or the driver's side based on officer safety considerations and roadside conditions.

Documents the Trooper Will Request

- Driver's License (CDL)
- Vehicle Registration (Cab Card)
- IFTA Registration

Additional documents may also be requested depending on the situation, including proof of the annual periodic inspection, special permits, hazardous materials shipping papers or manifest, and hazardous materials registration if applicable. If the driver is not operating locally or claiming the short-haul exemption, the trooper will typically request the driver's Record of Duty Status through the Electronic Logging Device (ELD).

Overview of Commercial Vehicle Inspection Levels

- Level I – North American Standard Inspection: A comprehensive inspection that includes both the driver and the vehicle.

- Level II – Walk-Around Inspection: Similar to Level I but does not require the trooper to crawl under the vehicle.
- Level III – Driver Only Inspection: Focuses exclusively on driver credentials and documentation.

Most Common Violations Found During Roadside Inspections

- Brake system violations such as air leaks or worn components
- Tire violations including insufficient tread depth or exposed cords
- Lighting and reflective device violations
- Hours-of-Service violations and inaccurate log entries
- Load securement violations involving insufficient or damaged tiedowns

Common Mistakes Drivers Make During Roadside Inspections

- Disorganized documentation
- Poor pre-trip inspections
- Lack of familiarity with the load
- Unprofessional attitude during the inspection
- Incomplete or inaccurate Hours-of-Service records

Final Thoughts

Roadside inspections are designed to ensure that commercial motor vehicles operate safely and comply with federal regulations. Drivers who maintain organized documentation, conduct thorough pre-trip inspections, and demonstrate professionalism during enforcement encounters are generally well prepared for roadside inspections. From an enforcement perspective, drivers who are organized, prepared, and professional typically experience quicker and more efficient roadside inspections.