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A crucial element of safe truck operation is conducting proper pre-use inspections. According to the UK Health & Safety Executive (HSE), over 18% of truck incidents occur as a result of mechanical failure, which could be avoided through correct completion of a pre-use inspection. Also, recent data collected by Ribble Valley Training showed that 65% of operators tested didn't know how to conduct the driving and braking pre-use check correctly, two vital elements where mechanical failures should be spotted. But what is a proper pre-use inspection? And as a manager or supervisor of the operations, what do you need your employees to do?

Here are seven key considerations for you to look out for when tackling this crucial issue.

1. Keep it simple

Pre-use inspections exist to identify the small problems and stop them becoming bigger problems. Your truck drivers need to know that they are not expected to be truck engineers, so should simply be checking the general working parts of the truck for signs of damage or wear. This allows any potential issues to be reported so that they can be dealt with by an expert, and helps prevent trucks from becoming unsafe or needing to be removed from service completely.

2. Check every time

Even if a truck has been checked by another operator that day, a pre-use inspection should still be carried out when the next driver wants to use the truck. Something could have happened to the truck to damage it or make it unsafe while it has been in use. Unless it is checked every time, this will be missed. Companies should assess how frequently checks must take place and ensure that operators know that it is their responsibility to complete them.

3. Understand the law

Truck operators may not realise that by failing to carry out a pre-use inspection they may be breaking the law by failing in their duty of care to themselves and to others. Even if the correct inspections are taking place, companies also need to remember to properly record the checks that take place. Without this, they may not be covered in the event of an incident. A thorough and professional pre-use check sheet will ensure that records are compliant. Pre-Use Inspection Sheet allows operators to record whether the

item they are checking is ok or if there is a defect to report. If there is, the operator must detail the information of the defect in the text box provided.

4. Be specific

Not every truck is the same and companies with several different types of truck may be tempted to use a generic pre-use inspection check sheet for all vehicles. However, to ensure safety, a specific pre-use sheet should be used for every type of truck and cover all the major parts that should be checked. For example, a truck operator using a diesel truck will need to check a different starting procedure than those using an electric / gas / truck.

5. Provide training

Although pre-use inspections are covered in forklift operator training, a recent RVTC test showed that this is the area in which drivers are performing most poorly (compared to efficiency or practical driving skills, for example). Almost two-thirds of those tested did not know how to conduct the driving and braking check correctly, 49% did not know how to check the operators seat properly and 48% were unaware how to suitably check the mast. Employers should offer suitable training to ensure operators have these essential skills. All components checked within the pre-use inspection are equally vital for the safety of both your operators and your operations.

6. Stay safe

Sometimes with so much to consider, operators can forget fundamental safety principles when conducting a pre-use inspection, like not operating the hydraulic controls from outside the cab, not standing under the raised equipment while checking the lifting components or not wearing personal protective equipment. Operators should ensure they remember their basic skills and operate safely, even when doing a pre-use check.

There are a number of benefits of pre-use inspections, such as reducing the cost of truck ownership and contract penalties, increasing uptime. However, the most important role of these checks is to help to prevent incidents and injuries. To improve safety and reduce risk, employers should take steps to ensure that inspections are not overlooked and that operators are trained and competent to inspect the equipment.