



Safety must be more than carrier ratings

By John A. Gentle, DLP

SINCE I ACQUIRED A SECOND HOME IN VERMONT this year, my car has new tires and adjustments have been made to my brakes. Once again, I have become an active traveler on America's busy interstate system; and what I have observed on these highways reminds me not only about the challenges that logistics professionals have in qualifying and selecting safe carriers, but the direct and indirect breadth of your safety responsibilities and oversight.

Certainly, the most important internal and direct focus is your critical and vigilant evaluation of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's (FMCSA) Safety and Fitness Electronic Records (SAFER) system that offers safety data information about your carriers. Beyond that, the internal focus has to include the plant or distribution centers' operating processes that affect driver safety.

This focus begins with how and where the driver can drive and park once he has presented himself available for loading. Once on-site and parked, is it safe and well lit for the driver to move in between other vehicles to find the control center? If allowed into the facility, can he be easily identified with a bright safety vest and can he find a clearly marked floor route to rest rooms and cafeteria?

If your loading process is "live" and requires driver participation, have you vetted the loading methodology with your carriers' safety directors? If it requires the driver to operate equipment, are they qualified or licensed to do this work? If it requires lifting and carrying, has the cube and weight of the shipping unit been tested for the physical stress and fatigue it places on the driver?

If it is a flatbed shipment, is the driver required to climb on top of the load for tarping or load securement, and is a safety harness available and required? Is there a specific area on your company's site for flatbed straps to be safely applied without the strap hooks striking others. And, in the winter, is there a process

that requires drivers or the company to remove snow and ice from the top of trailers?

Driver safety extends to your customers as well. Do your customers have a hostile safety environment—either physical or bad operating practices? When carriers report that, do you counsel with your customers or just allow drivers to risk injury?

As I alluded to earlier, driving with big semis at high speeds on the interstate is very different than driving 35 mph on city and suburban roads. In the early 1990s, Congress directed the Federal Highway Administration to educate the driving public on how to safely share the roads with trucks, and the FMCSA introduced a program called "No Zone" in 1994.

While our children are being taught about the actual blind spots or areas around trucks and buses where their car "disappears" from the view of the drivers, many of our colleagues have forgotten about

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the danger of these blind spots that are the Side No-Zone, Rear No-Zone, and Front No-Zone areas of the trucks—as well as how long it takes to bring a big rig to a safe stop.

For us, it is pretty intuitive that passing a truck should be done promptly and without interruption, and the risk is great if we choose to hang out in the No Zone. Don't delay, schedule No-Zone classes and hand out literature so this important information can be brought home and shared with spouses and friends.

Lastly, transportation and logistics leaders need to be proactively engaged with the state and local DOTs and metropolitan planning organizations to assist them with plans for the safe movement of freight in their areas.

Your responsibility around safety is much, much more encompassing than having someone check SAFER annually to make sure your carriers have a "satisfactory" safety rating. You must bring all of the aspects of safety to life. □

John A. Gentle is president of John A. Gentle & Associates, LLC, a logistics consulting firm specializing in contract/relationship management and regulatory compliance for shippers, carriers, brokers, and distribution centers. A recipient of several industry awards, he has more than 35 years of experience in transportation and logistics management. He can be reached at jag@RelaTranShips.com.