

# Professional Choices for the Professional Driver

It's very important for drivers of commercial vehicles to realize they are PROFESSIONAL drivers. Professional drivers are held to a higher level of driving skill and knowledge than that of passenger vehicle operators. The professional driver must make the right choices and set an example for others on and off the road. It's important for them to share their knowledge with less experienced drivers and lead by example.

I deal with several types of commercial vehicle operators on a daily basis through road-side inspections and routine patrol. In my opinion, waste vehicle operators are some of the most highly trained and professional commercial vehicle operators I deal with. They are very knowledgeable about the vehicles they operate and they take pride in their jobs. When I find issues, it is usually because the driver tried to take a short-cut or was in a hurry and had a lapse in judgment.

## Common Violations

One of the most common violations I see are improperly secured loads. The majority of load violations occur with roll-off vehicles, and deal with improperly covered loads and rear container securement. California Vehicle Code (CVC) section 23115, requires refuse vehicles to be covered completely to prevent any of the load from spilling or falling from the vehicle. It is common for loads on vehicles using automatic tarping systems not to be covered completely, with portions of the load hanging over the sides of the container. The driver may be required to adjust the load to insure it is within the container and adjust the tarp by hand, making sure the entire load is covered.

Over the past few years, I have seen an increase in compliance with rear container securement. This is covered in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 393.134, which requires roll-off containers to be secured to the vehicle within 6'7" from the rear of the container, unless equipped with an integral securement system. The most common violations I encounter, are drivers using nylon securement straps around the sharp metal edges of the container. This can be done, as long as edge protection (CFR 393.104 (f) (4)) is used, to insure the straps do not become cut or frayed. In the event a strap is damaged, a driver must replace it as soon as possible.

This brings me to an important topic, vehicle inspections. We have all heard about inspection training where drivers are taught to do pre/post trip inspections, and to conduct inspections throughout the day to ensure their trucks and equipment are safe to operate. A cut securement strap is a perfect example of something that could be in excellent condition during a pre-trip inspection, and incur damage during the work day. It's important, and required by law, for drivers to complete their inspections. In my personal experience, I can recall countless times I have stopped a driver for a simple violation, such as a license plate lamp or headlight not working, only to find other serious safety violations, and then after reviewing the driver's pre/post trip report, none of the equipment violations are marked as a deficiency.

## Owner's Responsibility Violations

Most commercial drivers are aware that law enforcement in California has the ability to issue "owner's responsibility" citations, per California Vehicle Code (CVC) 400001(a). Unfortunately, this has caused drivers to count on citations being issued to the company, and they are less likely to complete inspections as required. California courts are holding drivers responsible by finding them guilty for violating section 1215 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR), which addresses failure to properly complete inspections. Violations of this section can lead to fines of over \$600 for each incident, and one or more points on the motor vehicle record.

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So, what can we do to insure violations like this do not occur? It is my sense of duty to stress an importance for drivers to know they are professionals and must take pride in their job.

Professionals have a positive attitude, and are constantly improving their knowledge through training and proper decision making. It is important to get drivers involved in safety programs and have them speak at tailgate meetings about some of the issues they face in the field. Sharing experience and information is one of the best ways to keep people involved and let them know their input counts.

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