

TIMELY TRANSPORTATION NEWS AND INFORMATION FROM ACUITY

Trucker FOCUS

FALL 2016



PREPARING FOR
WINTER'S BLAST

page 2

PREPARING YOUR TRUCKING BUSINESS FOR WINTER'S BLAST

By **Cliff Johnson**, Acuity Trucking Specialist

I could write a small book on preparing a trucking business for the challenges sub-zero weather presents.

We all know it is vital to prepare equipment for winter weather—using coolant with nitrate, treated diesel fuel, and proper viscosity oil, replacing windshield wipers and fuel filters, draining any condensed water from gearboxes, and more. Not only do you have to prepare equipment for freezing temperatures, you should also prepare your drivers with the knowledge and tools to help them be comfortable, safe, and alert in successfully operating your equipment in even the most challenging environments.

Winter Challenges

As a motor carrier, you expect your drivers to take responsibility in maintaining proper control of their vehicle at all times. This is especially important when adverse weather conditions strike. Take away the good driver or the well-maintained equipment and disaster can strike.

Unfortunately, thousands of professional drivers are seriously injured—both in and out of the cab—during challenging winter conditions each year. Working successfully in these conditions demands a driver's full attention and skill, along with training, education, and effective company policies.

So what can a motor carrier do to help their drivers with winter challenges? First, focus on training:

1. Train drivers to use three points of contact

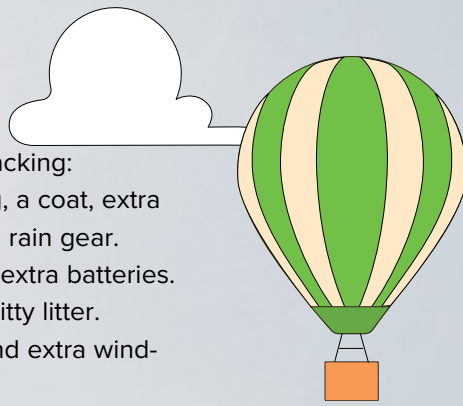
whenever entering or exiting their tractor, trailer, or other working surface.

2. Encourage proper footwear. A full-support leather boot or hiker shoe with a rugged non-slip sole is good. Consider providing a cost-sharing program for drivers who purchase footwear meeting your qualifications.
3. When appropriate, encourage non-slip attachments, such as cleats or shoe chains over boots.
4. Train drivers to slow down when they walk and check their footing regularly. Snow can accumulate on top of ice in and around truck parking areas. Older drivers are particularly susceptible to falls and, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average age of a commercial driver in the U.S. is 55 years old.
5. Encourage your drivers to wear proper gloves for better grip and warmth.

Second, focus on preparation:

1. Check weather and road conditions before traveling and use this information to determine the best routes with the hours available. It does not make sense to go out in bad weather and run a few risky miles, using up available driving time. The Federal Highway Administration provides information on weather and specific road conditions at www.fhwa.dot.gov/trafficinfo/index.htm.





2. In every truck consider packing:
 - Loose layers of clothing, a coat, extra gloves, a warm hat, and rain gear.
 - A quality flashlight with extra batteries.
 - A bag of sand, salt, or kitty litter.
 - A windshield scraper and extra windshield washer fluid.
 - Jumper cables.
 - Tire chains or traction mats.
 - A blanket, food, and water. (When I was a driver, I even carried a portable propane cook stove with extra fuel cylinders, cans of soup, and water.)
3. If appropriate, maintain at least a half tank of fuel during the winter.

necessary so you can ensure they are correctly installed when needed.

It should go without saying that drivers should thoroughly clear all snow from mirrors and glass surfaces in the truck for unobstructed visibility. Buckle up and keep headlights on as well.

Drive for the Weather

Depending on a truck's loaded weight and configuration, its handling characteristics change when encountering ice, snow, hard rain, strong winds, or other challenging weather.

Have your drivers been trained to exercise caution on bridges and overpasses and to recognize hazards such as black ice? Are they aware that they shouldn't use cruise control when driving on slippery surfaces? If your trucks are equipped with antilock brakes, training your drivers not to pump the brakes is also important.

Educate drivers to anticipate their next move and how other traffic is responding to the weather conditions. When driving in bad weather, drivers should increase following distance by leaving at least four vehicle lengths in front of the vehicle for every 10 mph to allow sufficient time and room for turns and stopping.

Winter weather can present challenges for any driver. Be sure your drivers make it home safely by providing winter driving tips and training and encouraging them to be prepared. ●

Vehicle Condition

In addition to training drivers and preparing for bad weather, maintaining vehicles in top condition is essential. Perform a thorough pre-trip inspection. This is important in any weather, but particularly in cold and severe conditions.

Tires are one of the most important mechanical aspects of keeping your vehicle under control in snowy and icy conditions. Both steer and drive axle tires should have ample tread depth to provide the best control. If possible, structure your tire replacement program to allow for the greatest tread depth in winter. If you are operating in conditions or states requiring the use of chains, ensure chains are in good condition. If your driver has never used chains before, proper hands-on "chaining up" training is



FOX VALLEY TECH TRAINING PUTS STUDENTS IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT

Fox Valley Technical College (FVTC) in Appleton, Wisconsin, offers some of the most advanced driver training in the nation, providing a level of instruction few other venues can match. The college also provides training to all CDL examiners in Wisconsin.

Each year, Acuity's claims staff take part in training sessions held at the center. From the driver's seat on a

controlled course, they learn how to drive a tractor-trailer in a number of different road conditions, how to effectively handle skids and other hazards, and more. They conduct pre-trip inspections and learn about load securement and other tasks drivers perform.

In September, FVTC brought its world-class training to Acuity's corporate headquarters in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. There, underwriters got hands-on experience with situations truckers face every day, including motor vehicle inspection, mechanical and safety issues, and regulatory compliance.

"You don't understand what truckers deal with on the road if you always sit behind a desk," says **Cliff Johnson**, Trucking Specialist at Acuity. "By having staff participate in the program, we can connect with our trucking customers with a greater level of understanding. When claims occur, we can better assess the contributing factors involved, from loading incidents to on-road accidents." ●



AVOID DRIVING DISTRACTIONS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

The FMCSA restricts the use of hand-held mobile devices by drivers of commercial vehicles. In addition to prohibiting texting, the FMCSA forbids a driver from holding a mobile device to make a call.

Drivers who use a mobile phone to talk while driving can only use a hands-free phone located in close proximity and may not reach for a device in a way that requires them to leave a seated driving position, restrained by a seat belt. They



may not press more than a single button to make a call. The rule applies any time a commercial motor vehicle is on a roadway, whether or not it is moving.

Penalties for violations are stiff: potential revocation of a driver's license and up to \$2,750 for drivers and up to \$11,000 for employers who allow or require drivers to use a hand-held communications device while driving. It's also important to note that a carrier's own policy may be stricter than the FMCSA requires.

Using a hand-held mobile phone is dangerous because it takes a driver's eyes off the roadway. Research shows that the odds of being involved in an accident or dangerous event, such as unintentional lane deviation, are 6 times greater for drivers who engage in dialing a mobile phone while driving and 23 times greater when texting while driving. ●

THE ACUITY MOTOR CARRIER TOOLBOX

NOW AVAILABLE ONLINE!

Acuity is proud to offer our Motor Carrier Toolbox to our trucking clients. The toolbox provides motor carriers with operational tools including human resources items such as driver applications, driver qualification file materials, sample owner-operator agreements, medical examination report forms, and more. It features driver tools such as daily logbook sheets, HOS/electronic logging device information, and pre- and post-trip inspection report forms.

“From the thousand-truck fleet to the single-truck operation, every motor carrier faces challenges in striving to remain compliant with the additional costs of FMCSA regulations,” says **Cliff Johnson**, Trucking Specialist, Acuity. “Acuity’s Motor Carrier Toolbox simplifies the process of compliance by helping motor carriers understand requirements they face and offering useable tools and information to assist in meeting those requirements.”

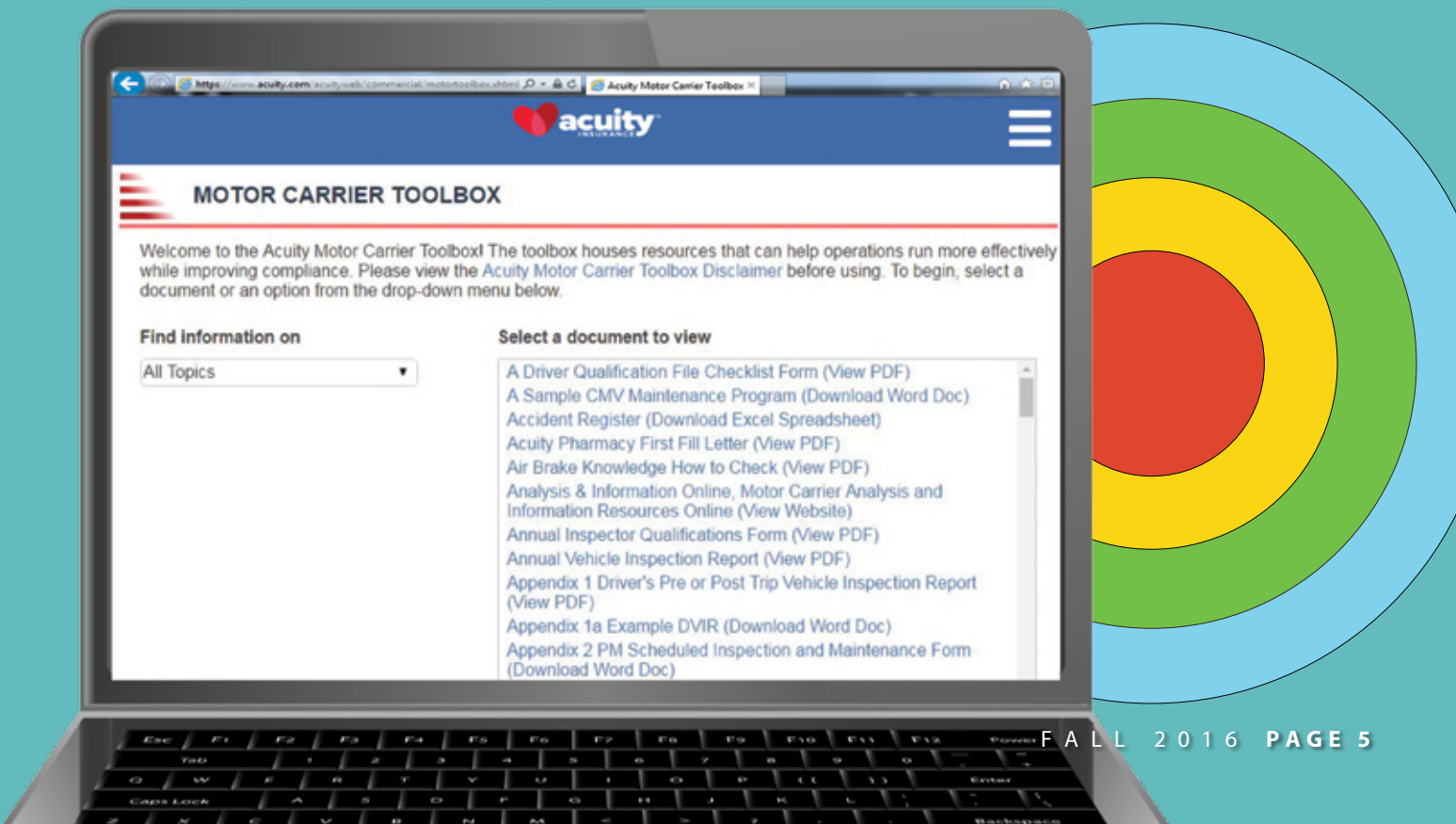
The toolbox also offers unique compliance documents, such as a sample vehicle maintenance and repair program, a sample drug and alcohol program, and owner-operator

lease agreements. Also included are truck-related safety posters and materials, driver meeting presentations, and other safety information.

“Acuity’s Motor Carrier Toolbox is a valuable resource for transportation companies,” Johnson says. “As part of a well-designed safety and compliance program, the toolbox can help motor carriers achieve lower CSA scores, reduce citations and out-of-service violations, minimize liability risk, and lower rates of driver turnover through increased driver morale and increased profits.”

In addition to the toolbox, Acuity provides resources to help motor carriers run their business. These include truck driver training videos, a nurse triage service in workers’ compensation, managed care, available log notes from claims adjusters, and more—all of which show Acuity’s commitment to meeting the needs of motor carriers.

The Acuity Motor Carrier Toolbox can be found online at acuity.com under the heading “Business.” Safety videos and other materials can be found online under the heading “Customer Care.” ●



WISCONSIN-BASED TRANSPORTATION SPECIALIST PROVIDES SERVICE IN A FLASH

For more than 30 years, the name FLASH has been synonymous with service in the transportation industry.

“We give our customers what they want, when they want it, and how they want it,” says **Pat McConnell**, founder and CEO of the Green Lake, Wisconsin-based firm.

“As an interstate transportation company, service is all we do,” adds **Mandi Hinrichs**, McConnell’s daughter and company President. “We take that philosophy seriously and work to be a true partner to our customers.”

The FLASH philosophy has led not only to strong business growth, but also remarkable customer longevity. Among the company’s more than 1,000 customers are nearly a dozen who have been with FLASH since its founding. “We have been fortunate to hook our wagon to our customers and share in their success,” McConnell says.

Growing a Business

In 1984, McConnell took his experience as a driver and transportation manager to form his own company in Berlin, Wisconsin. He started the business with long days driving and working on his equipment, and an unwavering dedication to growing what would become a successful family business.

In the early years, the company was an intrastate carrier consisting of five employees and three trucks, operating under the Fairwater Sand Transit name. The company transitioned to an interstate operation in 1987 and changed its name to Freight Lime and Sand Hauling (FLASH). Over the past 20 years, the business has shifted its focus to the transportation of dry bulk commodities, but still maintains the FLASH name.



Mandi Hinrichs, Company President, and Pat McConnell, Founder and CEO

With Pat's leadership and his wife, **Lynn**, by his side, FLASH grew to where it is today, with more than 100 trucks, 140 drivers, nearly 250 employees, and annual sales approaching \$30 million. Its corporate headquarters in Green Lake, built in 1999, provides 5,000 square feet of office space and a 20,000 square-foot maintenance facility. Most tractors within the fleet are less than four years old, allowing FLASH to offer customer service with a high level of dependability.

FLASH also maintains a good community reputation founded in safe operations. "Our trucks travel through a lot of small towns, sometimes hundreds of times per week. Our safety personnel are visible in and work with those communities," says McConnell.

"We also have a very proactive employee safety program that includes an effective return-to-work component," McConnell adds. "It pays dividends for us and provides a better workplace for employees."

High-Tech Meets High-Touch

FLASH combines its high-touch customer service with a high-tech approach that keeps its operations rolling smoothly. The company has consistently been an early adopter of in-truck technology and has used electronic logs for several years. Every FLASH truck is equipped with a satellite communication system that allows information to be gathered at a detailed and accurate level, such as mileage rates, speeds, load information, and more.

"Technology has been at the core of our safety program," McConnell says. "We've had onboard computers in our trucks since the late 1980s. Any new technology that comes out, we grasp it."

FLASH utilizes centralized, satellite communication-based dispatch at its corporate headquarters, which is staffed 24/7. Having dispatch housed at one facility and combining that with technology for tracking, communication, and safety has enabled FLASH to maximize the utilization and efficiency of employees and equipment and provide the highest level of customer service.

FLASH's Future

McConnell has retired from the trucking side of the business and turned the reins of the business over to his daughter. "She already has a great team in place to manage the company," he says.

For her part, Hinrichs plans on building on the tradition and reputation for service FLASH has established to propel the company's continued success.

Honored for Service

In 2016, Pat McConnell was honored with the Frank W. Babbitt Award from the Wisconsin Motor Carriers Association (WMCA). The Babbitt Award was established in 1977 to recognize service and to encourage a tradition of public and industry service among the members of the WMCA. Eligibility for the Babbitt Award is based on service to the association, the trucking industry, and to the community.

According to the WMCA, Pat is "a true friend to the Wisconsin trucking industry and a dedicated servant to his family, friends, employees, and customers." He has been a stalwart member of the WMCA for more than 25 years and has served as a board member since 2009, first as Treasurer and Secretary and now as Second Vice Chairman.

Despite the long hours spent at FLASH, Pat has also dedicated countless hours to his local community and is a member of several benevolent organizations, such as the Catholic School Endowment Fund, the parish council, and the local hospital board, serving in many capacities including Board Chairman. He is a current board member of Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce (WMC). Earlier this year, he purchased a local grocery store to save it from closure, which would have left his small community without a grocer. He remains a key donor to the local Boys & Girls Club, All-Saints Community Church and School, and Oshkosh Area Community Foundation.



"My dad taught me that relationships, not transactions, are the key to success in this business," she says. "It's been that way since we began, and it's something that will remain a priority for everyone here in the future." ●



2800 South Taylor Drive
Sheboygan WI 53081

T: 800.242.7666
F: 920.458.1618

www.acuity.com

Trucker
FOCUS



Find us on
facebook

facebook.com/acuitytrucking



Check out Acuity's trucking blog
www.acuity.com/SimplyTruckingBlog



For additional free copies email
TFsignup@acuity.com