



# TRUCKER

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ISSUE 3

# Focus



**ENHANCE YOUR**  
**PROFITABILITY**

# ENHANCING PROFITABILITY AND WORKING TO AVOID UNNECESSARY LIABILITY & NUCLEAR VERDICTS

*By Cliff Johnson, Acuity Trucking Consultant*

In my role at Acuity, I have the opportunity to visit many different trucking operations, including long haul, regional, local, ready-mix, sand and aggregate, logging, and much more. But regardless of the type of trucking a company does, the most significant differences I see are in the management processes and programs they have in place. Those differences can impact the company's return on investment, profitability, exposure to risk, liability and, in some cases, lead to court cases resulting in conviction or even nuclear verdicts.

Having spent over three decades driving and managing trucking operations, I have observed that the effort put into operating a trucking company can be compared to paddling a canoe on the river. The moment you stop looking around the corner ahead and stop working the paddle is the moment you begin to slide backward with the river's current.

But none of this directly answers the question of what our industry would consider the secret to success. In my opinion, the secret is simply working continually to understand and improve the fundamentals of

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managing your company's trucking operations. Some of the most profitable trucking operations are those where management maintains their due diligence in identifying areas of opportunity to improve, determining the methods and resources to best obtain desired results, and auditing the results to determine if the outcome is satisfactory or if

further changes are needed.

One example of this is the American Trucking Research Institute's (ATRI) recent study titled "Understanding the Impact of Nuclear Verdicts on the Trucking Industry." In many of the 600 nuclear verdicts studied in their research, failure of the motor carrier to comply with FMCSA's

seven BASICS (Behavioral Analysis and Safety Improvement Categories) contributed to nuclear verdicts. One quote from a plaintiff's attorney that caught my attention was, "The defense intends to focus on the 30 seconds before the crash. And when I handle a case, I look long before that. I look at how the driver was hired, how they were trained, and supervised."

Though this article is not directly about compliance, given our legal system, I have seen some of the most profitable and fastest growing operations



successfully focusing their attention on the details of their operations, including compliance. So, what should a company's managers do to set themselves apart from the competition in accomplishing this? I believe it is about how management pays attention to the fundamental details of their operation, such as their purpose and goals.

Auditing each of the fundamental basics of your operation, including driver hiring and training, maintenance, cargo securement, dispatching, and more, has everything to do with customer service and profitability. In a recent article in *Modern Materials Handling*,

Mark Rourke, President of Truckload for Schneider National, said, "What drives the trucking industry is variability of demand, variability of freight flows, weather, and a huge number of people and machines that help you deal with variability."

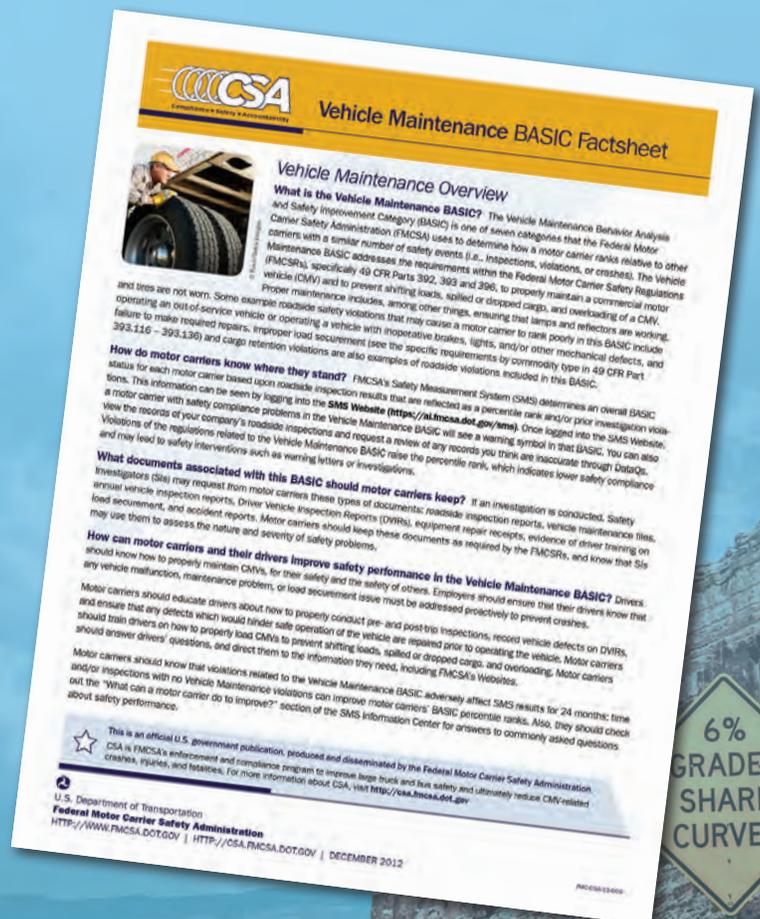
Whether we like it or not, the trucking industry has and will continue to see changes. Managing the people and machines that move your company forward and looking for opportunities to continually improve are the differentiators I see between profitable and growing companies and those that are not.



# Motor Carrier TOOLBOX

From FMCSA-issued tools about the seven BASICs to the Acuity-created Trucker Talks, Acuity's Motor Carrier Toolbox provides resources motor carriers and drivers can use to improve safety and enhance performance.

Get more info: All the resources of the Motor Carrier Toolbox are now available without a sign-in! Visit [www.acuity.com/mctb](http://www.acuity.com/mctb) to see everything we have to offer!



# ASK THE SPECIALIST

**Cliff Johnson**  
is Acuity's Trucking  
Consultant. Have a  
question for Cliff?  
Reach him at  
[cliff@acuity.com](mailto:cliff@acuity.com).



## Ask Cliff

### ***“What do truck tire sidewall markings mean?”***

If you have been in the trucking industry for a while, you likely understand that proper tire care is critical to the operation of your truck. Though tires are costly, easily preventable tire failure can result in significant downtime and headaches far beyond the cost of the tires themselves. In my conversations with motor carriers, maintenance managers are usually aware of DOT tire identification numbers. However, there are drivers and others in the industry who are unfamiliar with the markings but could benefit from the information.

DOT tire identification numbers are pretty straightforward. They are located on one sidewall and start with the letters “DOT,” followed by several characters. The first two characters are the plant code for the manufacturer, the next characters are the tire’s size and brand characteristics, and the last four indicate when the tire was manufactured.

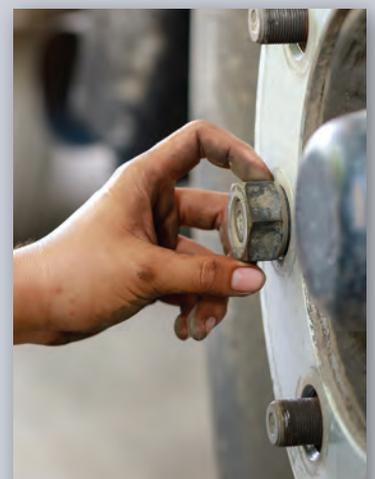
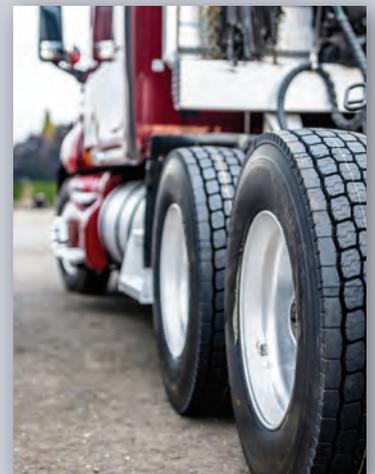
In the example below (DOT M5 EJ 013X 1917), the tire was manufactured in the 19th week of 2017.



If your commercial tire program retreads truck tire casings, a new retread DOT number will be branded on the tire’s sidewall, indicating when the retreading occurred.



One of the most important tire-related things to check for is proper tire inflation. Not only will proper tire inflation add many more miles to a tire’s capability, but it will help ensure you arrive at your destination safely and on time. It is always good practice to train both your drivers and maintenance crew on how your company maintains its tires and what to do when an issue arises.





## RELIEVE STRESS WITH A VACATION

Many people—including professional truck drivers—experience stress in their jobs. In addition to a trucker's long days of both driving and on-duty time, there are other stressful aspects of trucking, including:

1. **Saying goodbye to family and loved ones**
2. **Missing family gatherings and important events**
3. **Traffic congestion, bottlenecks, and rude drivers**
4. **Mechanical issues with commercial vehicles**
5. **Working with dispatchers, brokers, shippers, and receivers who may not fully understand what the driver's job entails for a particular load**
6. **Inclement weather**
7. **Road construction**
8. **Adhering to DOT regulations and making every effort to operate safely**

When you are feeling stressed, taking some time off can be a great way to relax, wind down, and reset. Some folks wonder why a trucker would want to travel on vacation when they are routinely gone "seeing the country" as part of their job. Well, the answer is clear—the commercial vehicle is simply not an RV. And when trucks are out running, there is barely enough time in a day to complete regularly dispatched loads, much less make time for scenic detours and vacations. In addition, sightseeing is not the same when your family or friends are not with you.

Studies have shown that truck drivers need to be away from their truck and job for at least five days to start unwinding and relaxing. If you are worried that you can't financially afford that extra downtime, plan ahead by saving a little money out of each pay settlement for your vacation.

As I have gotten older, I realize it will be my loved ones who are there for me in my old age—not my truck and business—so I try to make quality time for

them whenever possible. After all, they are a large part of what I am working to move ahead for.

Now, what are some ideas for where a truck driver can go with family or friends on vacation? Well, if you are like me, you will want to take into consideration the interests of the people you plan to travel with. What will put a smile on their faces and make them feel special, important, and listened to? Then mix in your own interests as you can.

Here are some vacations my trucker family has taken:

1. *A short, inexpensive mini vacation, traveling 70 miles to a museum, swimming that night at a hotel, then onto a campground where waterfalls, hiking, canoeing, campfires, and s'mores were enjoyed, along with good conversation, cards, and laughter.*
2. *Another inexpensive mini vacation idea is bicycling, kayaking, boating, or four-wheeling. A good winter sport can be snowmobiling if you are in a northern climate. Short-term rentals are available in many areas.*
3. *A longer trip my family did was to drive to Mammoth Cave in Kentucky. After touring the caves, we stopped at the Corvette Museum in Bowling Green, then we drove parts of the Blue Ridge Parkway in Tennessee and North Carolina. We ended at the NASA facility near Cape Canaveral, Florida.*
4. *Another longer trip was driving to the Grand Canyon, Hoover Dam, Death Valley, and the Pacific Coast Highway, stopping to see the redwood and sequoia trees along the way. Then, we visited Yosemite and Yellowstone before heading home again.*

Of course, COVID-19 has changed how we interact with others and take time off. But in the end, remember why you work so hard—try to share your time with your loved ones and create memories they will cherish for the rest of their lives. The truck will be there when you are ready to roll again.



# TRUCK STOPS:

## YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND TOMORROW

As a truck driver, you have probably experienced that trucking is not just a job, but a lifestyle. Drivers encounter many unique situations while on the road, with loads they are hauling, and with customers. To effectively manage your days and achieve a positive outcome, you must have patience and skills.

Many drivers would prefer to be home when their workday is done, but many times that is not possible. Instead, they end up finding a spot to park for the night. Many drivers use apps like Trucker Path to find the best parking spots that are available. These type of apps show parking spots in rest areas, weigh stations, and truck stops, and can indicate the approximate number of available spots in real time.

The best spots are often found at truck stops. Fortunately, truck stops have come a long way from the early ones that offered only dirt parking lots and fuel—and maybe food if you were very fortunate. Many of today's truck stops are owned by large chains, and some are still family owned and operated, but they all try to be attractive to truckers to gain their business.

The most popular truck stops of today offer a wide range of products and services that cater to drivers and their trucks. Many offer convenient in-and-out locations near major routes. A well-maintained road and parking lot with a good layout for traffic flow can give a great first impression. In addition to fuel and air, today's truck stops feature restrooms, showers, laundry facilities, and a menu that caters to drivers. But the leading-edge truck stops

do not stop there. Some have elevated themselves by offering services that include:

- **Full-service truck repair**
- **Truck washes**
- **Barber shops**
- **Chiropractors**
- **Medical clinics and medical card renewals**
- **Exercise areas for drivers and pets**
- **Driver lounges with TV and movies**
- **Powered parking spots with 120V, Wi-Fi, and air conditioning**
- **Merchandise stores**
- **Post offices**
- **Game rooms**
- **Banking**
- **Bowling alleys**
- **Chrome shops**
- **Good driver reward programs**

So, whether you're in for just an overnight stay, waiting for a reload, or completing a full 34-hour reset, what accommodations do you value most in your truck stop layover? Do you have any to add to our list? If so, please tell us at [cjohnson@acuity.com](mailto:cjohnson@acuity.com).



# WIN \$100! FIND THE FLAGPOLE TO BE ENTERED!

Acuity is proud to hoist a 70- by 140-foot American flag on a 400-foot flagpole at our headquarters in Sheboygan, WI. Visit [www.acuity.com/flag](http://www.acuity.com/flag) to learn more.

To enter, find the flagpole hidden in this issue and send an email with the location to [flagcontest@acuity.com](mailto:flagcontest@acuity.com). We'll randomly choose a winner from the correct entries received by November 15, 2021.



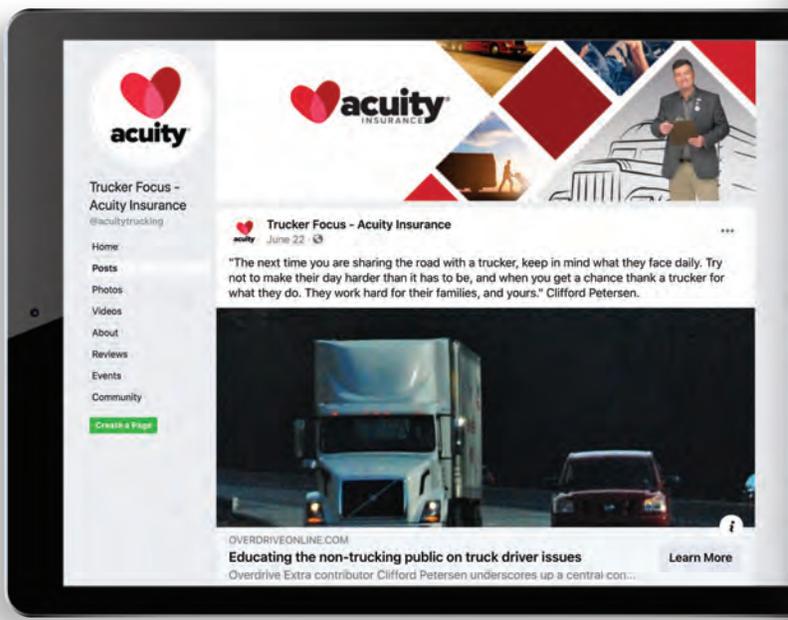
**WINNER** of last issue's contest was:

**Bill Cipperley**  
BNC Transport LLC  
Youngstown, OH

*This contest is not open to employees of Acuity or their immediate family members. For a complete list of rules, visit [www.acuity.com/flagcontestrules](http://www.acuity.com/flagcontestrules).*

# WORD OF MOUTH

Helping the public understand issues that matter to truck drivers has never been more important than today. Read about this and more on our Trucker Focus Facebook page, [facebook.com/acuitytrucking](https://facebook.com/acuitytrucking). You can also check out our trucking blog and access online resources and tools at [acuity.com](http://acuity.com).





# Acuity Knows Trucking!

Check out our dedicated trucking-focused online channels!

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 **Blog**  
[acuity.com/trucker-focus](http://acuity.com/trucker-focus)

 **YouTube**  
[youtube.com/acuityinsurance](https://youtube.com/acuityinsurance)  
(Trucker Focus playlist)

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 **Twitter**  
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## TRUCKING QUESTIONS?

Acuity's on-site trucking consultant provides over 30 years of industry experience to your business.

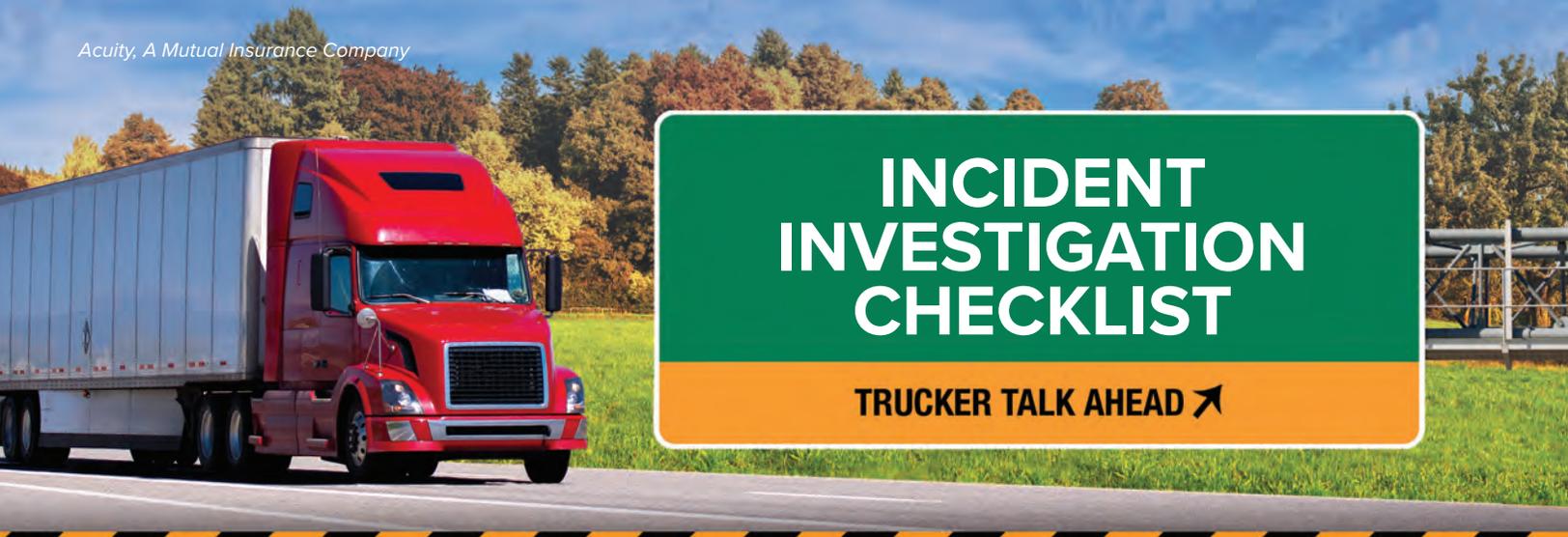
 **Email**

[trucking.news@acuity.com](mailto:trucking.news@acuity.com)

 **Phone**

800.242.7666, extension 1740





# INCIDENT INVESTIGATION CHECKLIST

**TRUCKER TALK AHEAD** ↗

**When investigating an incident, ask why. Use the checklist to get started. Keep asking why until you find the source of the incident.**

**DRIVERS**

- Are there written procedures for the tasks to be accomplished? If so, was the employee provided training?
- Is the employee physically capable of carrying out the tasks?
- Did the employee wear the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE)?
- Is enough time allowed for workers to do their tasks correctly and safely so they aren't tempted to take shortcuts?

**Comments from employee:**

**ENVIRONMENT**

Did the environment contribute to the incident?

- Light       Dark       Wet
- Heat       Wind       Cold weather or ice
- Outside     Indoors     Uneven ground
- Visibility (fog or shadows)     Other

**Comments on environment:**

**MANAGEMENT**

- Is management trained in hazard recognition?
- Did management anticipate the hazard and the risk?
- Was management aware that a deviation from safety procedures might occur and take steps to prevent it?
- Is management's role in hazard recognition and corrective action clearly defined and assigned?

**Comments from management:**

**EQUIPMENT**

Did the equipment contribute to the incident through a failure, lack of feature, or lack of maintenance?

- Tractor       Trailer       Liftgate
- Pallet jack     Hand jack     Other

**Comments on equipment:**

**SOURCE OF INCIDENT** - What conditions could have been changed to prevent the incident?

**NEXT STEPS**

GENERAL CATEGORY	SPECIFIC TASK	OWNER OF TASK	DATE COMPLETED
Repair or replace equipment			
Develop environmental solution (e.g., correct lighting)			
Train employees			
Train management			

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



**focused on truckers**

2800 South Taylor Drive  
Sheboygan WI 53081

T: 800.242.7666  
F: 920.458.1618

[www.acuity.com](http://www.acuity.com)

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