

Pre-Trip Inspections: Know Before You Go

You leave your truck for the night and return the next morning. In between, anything could happen. How do you know your vehicle is still in tip-top shape? You won't unless you conduct a thorough pre-trip inspection.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) requires pre-trip inspections every time you start a shift. If you're running late or in a hurry, it's tempting to skip the inspection or cut corners. But if you're not careful, you could suffer a breakdown or blowout, damage your truck and harm yourself and others on the road.

Set aside between 15 and 30 minutes for a proper inspection, and don't rush through it. Try to follow the same sequence every time so you don't miss any steps. Avoid common vehicle out-of-service violations and protect your truck with these extra tips:

Light all lamps. Look for burnt-out headlight bulbs, both on low-beam and high-beam. Check all other lights, including brake lights. Make sure your turn signals work properly. Fasten any loose light covers. Verify all reflectors are on the truck and trailer in the proper places.

Evaluate your braking system. Adjust brakes properly. Ensure brake hoses and lines are securely mounted and free from any cuts, frays or damage.

Inspect every tire. Tires wear differently depending on their position, so scrutinize all of them. Look for any cuts, damages or bulges. Maintain a tread depth of at least 4/32-inch. Measure tire pressure with a gauge (not a tire thumper) and maintain 90 – 100 psi. Tighten any loose lug nuts and report any missing ones. Listen for any air leaks.

Look underneath and inside your trailer. Check for signs of debris and even people—we've heard reports of drivers finding people sleeping under their truck or inside their truck. Remove any tree limbs or other objects from your path. Confirm your landing gear is fully raised.



Examine the fifth wheel. Make sure no gaps exist between the fifth wheel and the trailer apron. Inspect the kingpin and locking jaws.

Peek under the hood. Check your oil, coolant, transmission, wiper and power steering fluids and fill if needed. Inspect power steering hoses for any cracks or damage.

Don't forget your emergency kit. Pack flares, triangles and other safety devices. Make sure your fire extinguisher is charged and secured—this is a common vehicle out-of-service violation.

Get comfortable in the cab. Adjust your driver's seat and all mirrors before you start your truck. Fill out a Driver Vehicle Inspection Report (DVIR) whenever you spot any broken or missing parts so your motor carrier can repair your vehicle quickly.