



Fleet survey report 2013

Part 4: vehicle maintenance



Brake provides guidance for fleet managers to help them manage their road risk through its Fleet Safety Forum. This report contains results of a Brake survey of fleets' management of vehicle safety, and gives guidance on how fleet managers can ensure vehicles are safely maintained.

220 organisations responded to this survey of fleets, operating fleets of all sizes and vehicle types, and responsible for thousands of drivers and vehicles around the globe. Respondents included subscribers and non-subscribers to Brake's Fleet Safety Forum.¹

Inadequate vehicle maintenance can cost lives. For example, 2,125 crashes in Great Britain in 2011 were caused by vehicle defects, 52 of them causing deaths.² Unsafe tyres are particularly dangerous: tyres worn down to the legal minimum of 1.6mm increase stopping distance at 80km/h (50mph) by up to 44% in the wet.³

It is vital fleet managers thoroughly manage the maintenance and repair of their vehicles, to protect their drivers and members of the public and avoid the human cost of crashes, and to avoid costly insurance claims. Research from Australia found that a fleet insurance claim after a crash can cost as much as 15 times more than direct repair costs.⁴ A crash can also incur many costs not covered by insurance, including employee downtime and reputational damage.

Even without crash involvement, poor maintenance can be costly. Regular servicing of vehicles can fix small problems early on, eliminating the need for expensive repairs down the line.

Roz Cumming,
Brake professional engagement manager



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Ensuring a high standard of servicing and repair

Two thirds (63%) of managers surveyed outsourced all their vehicle servicing and repair, with a further 15% using a combination of in-house and outsourced repairs and servicing. Less than a quarter (22%) completed all servicing and repairs in-house.

Fleet managers who outsourced services and repairs were less stringent in their checks of mechanics working on their vehicles. Of companies using outsourced maintenance alone: 60% set minimum qualification standards; just half (52%) ensured mechanics' qualifications were checked and verified; and less than a quarter (23%) ensured regular training was provided.

Among fleets that carried out maintenance and repairs in-house: 79% set minimum qualification standards; 88% ensured checked mechanics' qualifications; and 79% provided regular training.

It is vital vehicle mechanics are properly trained and qualified, and keep their knowledge and skills up-to-date. Mechanics who have not undergone proper training and testing may not have the necessary skills or experience to be able to identify a defect, know how it should be repaired, or be able to repair the defect properly. Fleet managers must make sure everyone working on their vehicles is sufficiently qualified and experienced with the types of vehicles in the fleet.

ADVICE FOR MANAGERS

Fleet managers should insist any mechanics working on their vehicles are qualified to a minimum standard, such as a BTEC or NVQ qualification in the UK, or an AQF certificate in Australia. Fleet managers who hire mechanics should check qualifications and competencies on employment, verify competencies on an ongoing basis through monitoring and assessments, and provide regular training to ensure employees' skills are up-to-date.

Fleet managers who outsource maintenance should also expect a high standard of qualification and competency from mechanics. Minimum qualification standards, as well as qualification checks and regular training, should be requirements written into contracts.

Requiring mechanics to hold independent accreditation certificates is a good way for fleets to ensure that their employees are competent in their work. For example, in the UK the Society of Operations Engineers (SOE) offers accreditation through irtec, a scheme that assesses the competence of technicians working on commercial and passenger-carrying vehicles.

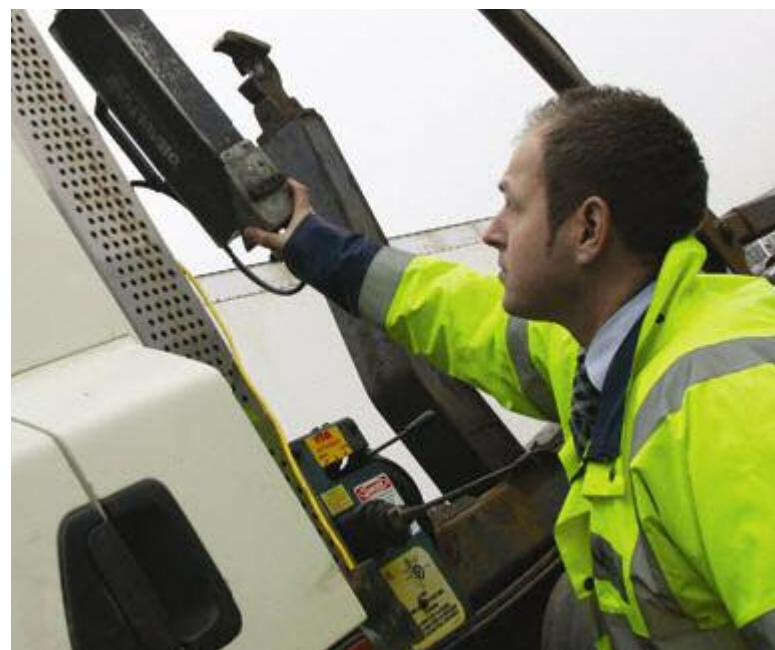
Daily vehicle pre-drive checks

Almost three quarters (72%) of fleet managers surveyed require drivers to complete pre-drive checks of their vehicles at least once a day. However, worryingly, almost one in 10 (9%) do not require any checks at all. Fleets that outsourced all their vehicle maintenance were far less likely to require regular checks: less than two thirds (62%) required checks at least once a day, compared to 95% of fleets that did not outsource any repairs or maintenance.

Fleets with trucks, buses and coaches were far more rigorous in their pre-journey checks than fleets with only smaller vehicles. All (100%) fleets operating larger vehicles required daily checks, compared with less than half (48%) of fleets operating smaller vehicles. Almost one in five (18%) managers of fleets with only smaller vehicles did not require their drivers to complete pre-drive checks at all.

Companies operating fleets have a duty to ensure their vehicles are safe and roadworthy. Failing to do so puts drivers and other road users at risk, and may be a criminal offence. Completing regular pre-drive checks of fleet vehicles is essential to ensure damage and defects are not missed between services, and that minor problems are fixed before they develop into larger, more expensive and dangerous defects. Figures from the UK Vehicle and Operator Services Agency⁵ (VOSA) indicate that a high number of commercial vehicles are on the roads with potentially dangerous defects. Of more than 2,000 vehicles randomly checked by VOSA in 2011/12, 26% were found to have roadworthiness defects, and 10% were required to be taken off the road due to these defects.

Regular checks are important for all fleets, but especially those with older vehicles. VOSA figures⁶ show that 37% of heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) that are 11-12 years old fail their annual roadworthiness test, compared with 9% of HGVs that are one-two years old.





ADVICE FOR MANAGERS

Fleet managers should train drivers to carry out pre-drive checks of their vehicles at least once a day, or more often if they are completing multiple long trips in a day. Drivers should check safety-critical parts such as tyre condition and pressure, and make sure the lights, mirrors and windscreens are clean and free from damage. Regular checks are just as important if vehicle servicing and maintenance is handled by an external provider: fleet managers and drivers still must take day-to-day responsibility for the safe running of their vehicles.

Training on completing these checks should be built into inductions for new employees. Regular refresher training and awareness-raising will help to keep this knowledge up-to-date for all employees. Fleet managers can ensure that checks are taking place by requiring drivers to complete daily record sheets and by carrying out regular spot-checks.

Fleets must have a clear process in place for reporting defects, arranging repairs and removing defective vehicles from the road if necessary. All reported defects should be fixed as soon as possible, and temporary vehicles made available. Fleet managers should keep records of all defects and maintenance, to identify where certain vehicles or parts have high defect rates and need to be investigated. Most importantly, it should be clear to all drivers they must not set out in a vehicle they do not believe to be safe. It is far better to delay a journey than to risk lives by allowing defective vehicles on the road.

Case study Gateshead Council trains drivers to maintain its fleet



Gateshead Council is a UK local government body, providing a wide range of services from public transport to waste collection. It operates a mixed fleet of more than 330 vehicles.

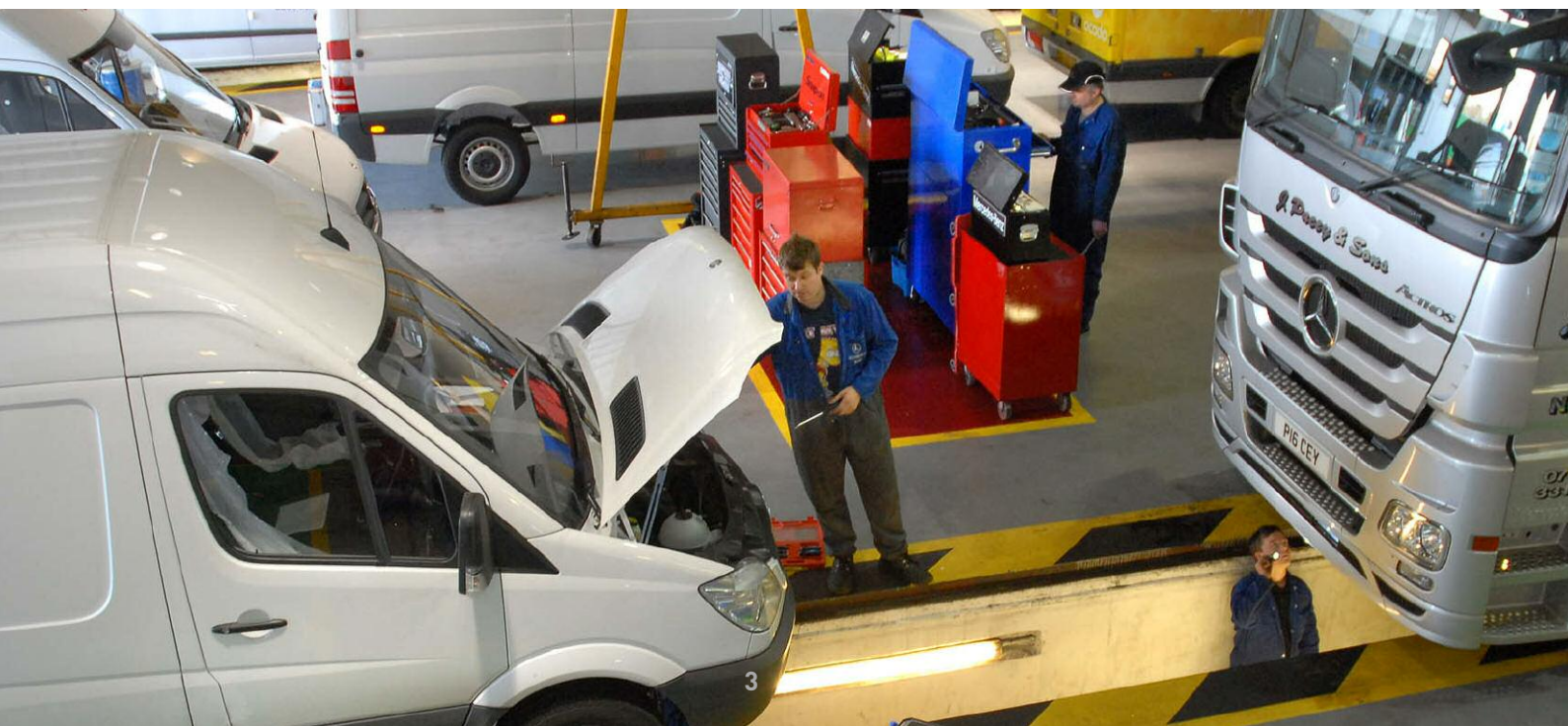
The Council provides a vehicle management, maintenance and breakdown service that is used by its own vehicles and offered outside of the organisation, for example to local taxi firms.

Individual training plans have been developed for all employees delivering the service, including: a five-day heavy goods vehicle inspection course; product awareness training; Safe and Fuel Efficient Driving (SAFED) training; and customer care training. Training is also offered out to local taxi firms and schools.

The Council encourages drivers to take responsibility for the safety of their vehicles, requiring them to: undertake daily vehicle checks; monitor miles per gallon performance; and maintain both internal and external cleanliness of the vehicle. These areas, along with driver assessment and monitoring information, are analysed on a quarterly basis. Detailed management information is supplied to managers, highlighting areas of concern and recommending action.

The Council encourages feedback on its vehicle maintenance and management performance from drivers who use the service. In June 2013, a customer service evaluation found that 95% of users are satisfied with the vehicle maintenance service.

For further information contact
Graham Telfer
Fleet manager
0191 4337425
grahamtelfer@gateshead.gov.uk





Recommendations for fleets

To ensure vehicles are safely maintained, Brake recommends fleet managers should:

- set minimum qualification standards, ensure these qualifications are checked and verified, and regular training is provided for mechanics working on their vehicles;
- ensure these standards, verifications and training requirements are built into any vehicle servicing and maintenance outsourcing agreements;
- train all new drivers to complete pre-drive vehicle checks at least daily as part of their induction, and provide regular refresher training;
- ensure checks are carried out at least once a day, through the use of record sheets and regular spot-checks;
- empower drivers to refuse to drive a vehicle they do not believe to be safe or roadworthy, until it has been checked by a mechanic or qualified manager;
- have robust procedures in place for reporting vehicle defects and fixing them quickly, including taking defective vehicles off the road when necessary; and
- take even minor vehicle defects seriously, to ensure they do not develop into more serious problems.

Further reading

Brake has published guidance reports for fleet managers on avoiding distraction, including:

- Vehicle maintenance: the interface between drivers and managers (published 2008)
- Breakdown safety (published 2009)

These and our library of more than 50 similar reports are all available for free to subscribers of the Fleet Safety Forum. Other subscriber benefits include: significant discounts on our seminars, webinars and conferences; one free webinar place per year; driver resources; and a regular e-bulletin of relevant road safety research and initiatives. Subscribe online, or contact Brake on +44 (0)1484 559909 or admin@brake.org.uk.



End notes

- 1 78 respondents (35%) were subscribers, 101 (46%) were non-subscribers, 41 (19%) did not state
- 2 DfT (2012) Reported Road Casualties Great Britain 2011 [online]. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reported-road-casualties-great-britain-annual-report-2011>
- 3 RoSPA (2005) Tyre tread depth and stopping distances [online]. Available at: <http://www.rospa.com/roadsafety/adviceandinformation/vehiclesafety/tyresafety/tread-depth.aspx> (accessed 21 August 2013)
- 4 Davey, Jeremy D. & Banks, Tamara D. (2008) Estimating the cost of work motor vehicle incidents in Australia. In Australasian Road Safety Research Policing Education Conference, 14-16 November, Wellington, New Zealand. Available at: <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/3813/>
- 5 VOSA (2012) Fleet compliance checks summary report 2011 to 2012 [online]. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fleet-compliance-checks-summary-report-2011-to-2012> (accessed 24 October 2013)
- 6 VOSA (2013) Effectiveness report 2011 to 2012 [online]. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vosa-effectiveness-report-2011-to-2012> (accessed 16 August 2013)