

Transportation Safety

Training ADVISOR

March 2025

Customer Service

Time to turn up the charm

The billion-dollar problem of
traffic jams

Saliva testing set to begin

Must a straight or box truck
driver have a DOT physical?

Information and resources to help your drivers operate safely



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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Want to improve driver training engagement? Try this out-of-the-box suggestion

Do your drivers say your training misses the mark or doesn't meet their needs? How about engagement? Do your drivers dread training or seem to be "checked out"?

If your answer to any of the above is yes, you may want to try implementing an "out-of-the-box" idea — using a suggestion box.

Why a suggestion box?

Some drivers may not want to approach management with a suggestion for training. Reasons for this apprehension can range from a general uneasiness to not wanting to admit the need for additional information or instruction on a topic.

By placing a suggestion box in an easily accessible location, like a break room, drivers can quickly jot down and submit their ideas and suggestions.

Make it easy to use

The suggestion box program should be easy for your drivers to use and easy for you to administer. Give drivers the option of identifying or not identifying themselves when submitting suggestions.

The box should be secure to ensure the confidence of your drivers in the program.

Take it seriously

Management should also take the program seriously. Yes, there will be some submissions that cannot be taken seriously, but overall, most suggestions will merit consideration.

Expect questions or comments based on a topic or issue such as, "the dispatcher and I don't agree on how to use the sleeper-berth provisions." You can interpret this as a cue that your drivers and/or dispatchers need reinforcement in understanding the sleeper-berth requirements.

When you cover a topic that is suggested as part of a training session, acknowledge that the topic is being covered based on a question or suggestion, but don't share who submitted it. This shows your drivers that they can have an influence on what is covered in training without feeling uneasy or embarrassed. ♦





TRAINING BLUEPRINT — CUSTOMER SERVICE

Turn up the charm and let the good ads roll!

In today's business world, the majority of contact between a company and its customers is done over the phone or by email. For many of your company's customers, the driver is the only representative who has a face-to-face relationship with actual people.

Because of this, your drivers' attitude, conduct, appearance, and attention to customer service all play an important role in how your company is viewed by current and potential customers.

TIP: Consider using a short video to introduce the topic of professionalism and customer service. Choose a video that represents the types of situations your drivers regularly deal with.

Drive the point forward

How your driver operates and cares for their vehicle can make a lasting impression on customers. Your trucks may travel all over the country, and anyone who's been "stuck" behind a truck for a while knows there's plenty of time to form an impression. Ever complained about a company during a long trip because the driver was frustrating to share the road with? To avoid this, advise your drivers to:

- Maintain a safe following distance;
- Stay in the right lane on upgrades, or use the slow travel lane;
- Avoid caravanning and getting too close to other vehicles;
- Use extra caution in cities/towns;
- Learn how to stop safely; and
- Be courteous with their headlights.

A little shine and buff never hurt

The vehicle should always be clean and well-maintained to create a good impression. Dirty vehicles, loose tarps, or dragging chains can send the message that drivers don't care about the company or the equipment.

Think of commercial trucks as cross-country rolling advertisements that *must* make a good impression whenever possible:

- Keep the wheel wells, windshield, and tarps clean;
- Clean the outer walls regularly; and
- Avoid dirty or torn mudflaps.



TIP: Open your session to a discussion on the importance of positive image and good customer service. Make sure the conversation remains constructive and doesn't become a complaint session.

A smile is the best accessory

A neat, well-groomed driver projects experience, capability, and authority — an excellent combination for your company. There's no need to get all dressed up, but clean clothing with no rips or tears goes a long way.

Tidy, friendly drivers might also get better service at loading docks and more respect from the general public, which is a nice added bonus.

Now make sure to act the part!

Timeliness: Punctuality is important, so drivers should always be on time. It's entirely possible that a customer

may be organizing their schedule around when the driver arrives. If the driver is going to be late for an appointment, it's best practice to call the customer and let them know what's going on. In the long run, this can save time and potential problems for the driver, the company, and the customer.

Attention to detail: When making a delivery, the driver should make every effort to follow the customer's company rules, including any special delivery or pick-up instructions. The driver should carefully handle all cargo, making deliveries as easy and incident-free as possible.

Attitude: The driver should be courteous when dealing with all customer personnel, never taking out frustrations or arguing with the customer. Extra caution should always be used when driving on a customer's property, which includes following posted speed limits and watching for pedestrians.

A lasting impression: Ultimately, the driver needs to remember that a customer's impression can lose or gain business for the company. Drivers should make every effort to be neat, courteous, punctual, and safe. ♦

TIP: Make sure you distribute any policies that your company has addressing this topic during your training session.



TRAINING HANDOUT — CUSTOMER SERVICE

Handling an angry customer

When a customer is angry, how the driver handles the situation can make or break your company's relationship with that customer. Ask your drivers to follow these tips to ensure a smooth experience:

- **Don't take a customer's anger personally.** Advise your drivers to remain calm and courteous. Focus on fixing the problem that caused the customer's anger, even if the problem isn't the company's fault. Your driver may receive the brunt of the anger, but assure drivers ahead of time that the anger is likely misdirected.
- **Apologize for the situation.** The driver doesn't need to take all the blame, but should still apologize to help foster good relations. Apologies can help quickly resolve a problem and move toward a solution.
- **Express concern that things didn't go as planned.** It's okay to own up to mistakes, and most customers find this approach honest and transparent. However, be sure drivers avoid patronizing the customer in the process.
- **Assure the customer that the company will do its best to make things right.** Even if there's nothing that can be done in the moment, this assurance can have a big impact on morale.
- **Determine what steps the company can take.** It never hurts to ask the customer how they would like to see a problem resolved.
- **Try to come up with a solution.** When possible, it's ideal to find a solution before leaving the customer. This ends the experience on a positive note.



If the driver needs to return to your company to work with management to correct the problem, have the driver assure the customer that a representative of the company will reach out as soon as possible. The driver should then follow up to help build good relationships with that customer. ♦

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TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE — CUSTOMER SERVICE

1. If you will be late for a delivery, you should NEVER:
 - A. Call ahead to alert the customer
 - B. Continue to follow road rules, even if it increases the delay
 - C. Contact the carrier to explain the delay
 - D. Drive faster

2. You don't need to look nice because all you do is drive the truck.
 - A. True
 - B. False

3. Which is an example of bad customer service?
 - A. Ignoring pickup and delivery instructions
 - B. Respecting the customer's property
 - C. Being courteous and honest
 - D. All of the above

4. After dealing with an angry customer, you should:
 - A. Explain to the customer that their anger is misplaced
 - B. Ignore the customer and let the problem solve itself
 - C. Assure the customer that someone will reach out to help
 - D. Take all the blame for the customer's complaints

5. You should know the customer's company policies for deliveries and drop offs.
 - A. True
 - B. False ♦

NAME: _____ **DATE:** _____

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The billion-dollar problem of commercial trucks in traffic jams

Getting stuck in traffic is more than just an inconvenience; it's costing the trucking industry billions of dollars each year.



The American Transportation Research Institute (ATRI) published a study, "Cost of Congestion," that showed traffic congestion in the United States added \$108.8 billion in costs to the trucking industry in 2022. This is a new record high for congestion costs.

The true price of delays

ATRI's study used several data sources (i.e., truck GPS database, *Operational Costs* benchmarks) to calculate the financial impact of delays on trucking companies.

The study found:

- A softening freight market in 2022 resulted in a slight decrease in total congestion hours but was offset by higher operational costs for the year than 2021.
- The overall cost of congestion increased by 15 percent from 2021.
- Delays are equivalent to more than 430,000 drivers sitting idle for one work year.

- Delays cost an average of \$7,588 for every registered combination truck.

Regional congestion costs

ATRI examined costs related to delays in states and metropolitan areas. The top 10 states each experienced costs of more than \$8 billion.

The leading states were:

- Texas (\$9.17 billion),
- California (\$8.77 billion), and
- Florida (\$8.44 billion).

The top 10 states accounted for 52 percent of trucking's congestion costs nationwide.

The top metropolitan areas for congestion costs were:

- New York City (\$6.68 billion),
- Miami (\$3.20 billion), and
- Chicago (\$3.14 billion).

Wasted fuel

The cost of traffic congestion includes wasted fuel. In 2022 it was found that congestion cost the trucking industry over 6.4 billion gallons of diesel fuel, adding \$32.1 billion in additional fuel expenses. ♦

With rule change and device approval, saliva testing set to begin

Saliva-based drug testing is closer to reality, with one critical step remaining. It was nearly two years ago that the U.S. DOT first adopted saliva-testing rules.

Such testing could not begin, however, until:

- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved at least one saliva-collection kit,
- The DOT cleaned up its regulations to clarify the collector training requirements, and
- The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) approved at least two laboratories to process saliva samples.

With a new DOT rule that went into effect on December 5, 2024, and the FDA granting approval to a collection kit, the first two of these steps are now completed and collector training should be underway. All that remains is lab approval, expected early in the new year.

Rules update

The DOT's December rule changes corrected several problems by:

- Providing temporary qualification requirements for those who observe mock saliva collections, in 49 CFR 40.35. Normally, these individuals would need a year of experience doing saliva collections, but such experience is not currently possible. The DOT added an exception that allows them to get the experience in the year after labs are approved.
- Adding privacy protections that were accidentally left out of the rules. Section 40.73 now specifies who may observe a saliva collection, similar to the rules for alcohol testing.
- Clarifying how collectors should document that they collected a sufficient volume of saliva (40.73).

These same rule changes were initially issued in June, but the DOT had to withdraw them due to certain objections.

There were no substantive differences between the June and December versions.

One step closer

The rule changes opened the door to collector training as of December 5, 2024, since the FDA had already approved a saliva collection device. This also cleared the way for labs to request HHS certification, a process that can take several months.

If you plan to include saliva in your drug testing arsenal, consider the following steps while awaiting lab approval:

- Confirm that your collection site will offer saliva testing and determine when they will have trained collectors;
- Contract with an HHS-certified lab (once they become available);
- Update your company policy to address saliva testing and make sure drivers are aware of the changes; and
- Train your drivers and managers on how and when you'll be using saliva testing. ♦



Expert Help

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Next Month's Topic: Vehicle inspections/Roadcheck

As spring approaches, it's time to start thinking about Roadcheck 2025! This year's inspection event is scheduled for May 13-15. This is a great time to remind drivers of the importance of pretrip, on-the-road, and post-trip inspections. ♦

Expert Help: Questions of the Month

Question: Must a straight or box truck driver have a DOT physical?

Answer: If the driver is operating the box truck in interstate commerce and the box truck weighs 10,001 pounds or greater or if the box truck is of any weight and it hauls hazmat that requires placarding, the driver must have a DOT exam, performed by a certified medical examiner.



Caution: If the driver operates in intrastate commerce only, the requirement for a DOT exam depends on the state. Each state's intrastate adoption of the requirement can vary.

Question: What ongoing training does the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) mandate for professional drivers and supervisors on an annual basis?

Answer: The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSRs) do not contain any specific annual or recurrent training requirements for a motor carrier that is not hauling hazardous materials. Recurrent instruction or training is left to the motor carrier's discretion based on its operation.

Do note that Section 390.3(e) of the FMCSRs states that drivers and employees must be instructed in and comply with the regulations, but it does not include specifics as to delivery, documentation, or time.

With that said, it is good practice for a motor carrier to provide instruction to its drivers so they can comply with the regulations. Also, the motor carrier should document this instruction so proof of training can be provided if needed during an audit or investigation. ♦

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