

I am a truck driver, one who loves enjoys his work and tries to operate safely. Operating safely is getting harder, partly because the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration relies heavily on "Scientific Information" that comes from laboratories, and ignores information supplied by truck drivers, those who are on the road for weeks at a time and can see, and comment truthfully, about what can and probably will happen.

Over the past many years truck driving and truck safety were studied with varying results as I note here. It was found that there were five types of trucking: Long haul, regional, short line haul, LTL long haul, and LTL short haul, the last two also being considered delivery. These last two require much more driver labor than the previous three, and should be ruled on separately. Although it was basically correct and only needed a bit of fine tuning, this finding was thrown out because of protest from the LTL services. It apparently would affect their business, and allow their drivers to operate in a safer manner.

During the workup to the new Hours of Service, a "study" conducted by the an association of truck stops, whose proper name escapes me, claimed that there was adequate parking for trucks. Yet you still find trucks parked on the side of the road, on ramps, and in shopping centers. Most of the very few truck stops in the Northeast, and other places in the country, fill up around five or six in the evening. Some fill up earlier, or fill up at the usual time even though they charge eight, ten, or twelve dollars to park for more than two hours. Rest areas, even during the day, cannot be used by drivers who only need a very short break. This is not adequate parking.

Because of the new "consecutive" hour limit, many drivers have said they've started driving faster and not stopping for anything so they could reach their destinations, or a safe haven, within the time allotted. I've driven much faster and much more aggressively than is normal to reach home in the allotted time. Other Drivers have said they'll just drive until they get the delivery made, and make their next pickup, then worry about how to log it. Obviously none of these practices are good for the public, but this is what many Drivers feel they must do so they can complete their tasks, or get to their planned destinations.

I have not seen where shippers or receivers have changed the way they do business, no matter what the industry says. Many still treat Drivers as unpaid labor who must unload their truck or pay someone else to do it, and many make Drivers with tight time schedules wait hours to pick up loads or make deliveries. There is no possibility we can plan a trip to reach a certain safe destination, or set up an appointment for delivery, until we know what time we leave the shipper. Yet many warehouses hold Drivers to appointments made days in advance, before the load is picked up. When we arrive late, for whatever reason, we're told to return a day or more later, or held for hours waiting for an open dock. It is impossible for Owner/Operators and small companies to work efficiently under these conditions.

To set up a delivery, the dispatcher will make an appointment for a driver to pick up a load, possibly a week in advance. He brings up his computer routing program, enters the origin and destination usually measured between post offices, and a route is determined by the computer. Better programs use differing speeds for towns and open country, but only the most expensive has information about low bridges or truck restrictions. That information is constantly changing, and needs constant updates, which again costs money and eats into the company's profit margin. Now the dispatcher, using the cheapest online routing program, has a route, usually the shortest distance between the

two points, that possibly uses roads a truck is not allowed on, or can't use because of obstacles or excessive tolls. He divides the mileage by whatever he feels is reasonable for the area and makes a delivery appointment, then gives the run to the driver. The receiver believes the dispatcher knows what will happen in the future and holds the driver to that appointment, no matter what. When the load is late, for whatever reason, the receiver can make the driver wait days without pay waiting for a new appointment.

Everything is the driver's fault, whether it is a small mechanical problem he did not catch, a truck that was loaded wrong, improper shipping papers his dispatcher told him to run with, or parking in a no parking zone when there is no other place available. Only the last is truly under the driver's control.

There are measures you can take to change these problems:

1. Delete the word consecutive from your vocabulary. This one word puts total control of the trucking industry in the hands of shippers and receivers, and is a major cause of the accidents and aggressive driving more prevalent today. A driver cannot plan a safe trip if he does not know how much time he will have available for traveling each day.

2. We, the truck drivers, do not need more break time, or less working or driving time. We need Off Duty time! The required ten consecutive hour break per day is good to a point, but allowing two hours of that break to be logged Off Duty during the day in increments of fifteen minutes or more, the Off Duty time not counting toward the consecutive limit, would make a driver's life easier, and the roads safer. This will give us time to eat lunch, to shower after unloading the truck, to take care of personal business, or help a stranded motorist. If we're sick, or need a "power" nap, this will allow us to continue working efficiently, which will help keep the cost of shipping down.

3. Encourage the expansion of rest areas with facilities and not just parking places. Many older drivers control blood pressure with diuretic medicines, or have controllable diabetes. We need places to drain our bladders.

4. Fine those who cause problems, rather than the easiest source of cash. As it is drivers have no control concerning how the truck is loaded, or how the Bill of Lading is written. Many times loads are paid by weight, or the shippers threaten to send the load with another company, and the only one who loses when something is wrong is the truck driver. A simple statement such as, "This is wrong, and if it's not changed you get the fine," would make changes possible. Truck drivers do not want to spend extra time at scales, so they will ensure the load is correct, if they have the power.

5. Encourage shippers and receivers to employ loaders and unloaders. When the driver must pay for someone else to do the work, that money is eventually added to the price of the goods, with many additions.

6. Reinstate the five tier system you had proposed several years ago. That system reflected the real world closer than anything else I've seen.

7. Most importantly, you must stop treating drivers as if we're two years old. Allow the driver freedom to work as he will, freedom to stop if he's tired, or to continue traveling when he's alert. Many times I've been told by dispatch to get a load delivered when I'm tired. I've also been willing and able to put more miles under my belt and sleep at a more restful time, yet had to stop, then drive when I'm naturally falling asleep, because of Government regulations. I

resent having Big Brother tell me what to do with no leeway for changing situations.

Remember, a major reason a truck driver chooses this career is his love of driving, of changing scenery, of moving from place to place. If someone does not like the driving aspect, or the constant change and time away from home, they move to a different career path. Shortening the hours a truck driver is allowed to drive is like telling him he is not allowed to live his life as he wishes. In many truck driver's eyes, that is taking away his freedom.

Also consider what a truck driver will do if you mandate even more off duty time. He will stop at the truck stop, or where ever he can, and with nothing else to do to pass the time many will walk over to the local bar to drink until early morning. Then after little sleep they will be off again, only not altogether sober.

These changes, and those suggested by other drivers, will make for a more stable and smoother running industry.