

# How to Perform a DOT Class A CDL Pre-Trip Inspection



One of the most important aspects of a fleet manager's job is to ensure that the fleet is compliant with FMCSA rules and regulations. One of their obligations is to perform systematic inspections and maintenance on the fleet vehicles. That begins each day before drivers are allowed to drive the truck and trailer off the lot with the pre-trip inspection. While drivers must be able to perform this inspection flawlessly in order to obtain their Class A CDL, it's imperative that the fleet manager is also capable of performing pre-trip inspections. Not only will this ensure ongoing compliance, but it will also give them a better understanding of their fleet's needs.

# What Is a Class A CDL Pre-Trip Inspection?

As the name implies, a Class A CDL pre-trip vehicle inspection is a thorough check of the truck, trailer, and cargo before a trip. It is based on the DOT pre-trip inspection checklist. All of the major systems must be inspected to make sure that everything is operating properly. The results of the inspection have to be documented using a digital vehicle inspection report (DVIR). If any issues, damage, or problems are discovered they must be remedied before the driver is allowed to leave with the truck. The entire process should take somewhere around 15 minutes and drivers are required to report themselves “on duty, not driving” during this period.

## Steps for Completing a Pre-Trip Inspection



A thorough pre-trip vehicle inspection involves every aspect of the truck and trailer, inside and out. Breaking the inspection down into sections is one way to ensure that everything is checked.

# Get Under the Hood



Every Class A CDL pre-trip inspection begins before the driver fires up the engine with an inspection of the engine compartment.

There are several things that need to be inspected including:

- Checking fluid levels including the oil, coolant, and windshield washer solvent.
- Observing the engine for any fluid leaks or drips.
- Checking hoses and belts, looking for damage or wear.
- Looking at wiring and noting any frayed, misplaced, or damaged wires.
- Checking the fan belt and blade for damage, nicks, or cracks.
- Tightening caps and securing the dipstick into position.
- Take a look at the steering axle tires, checking for uneven wear.
- Verify that the shocks, ball joints, and kingpins are properly lubricated and in good shape.

Take note of any defect, broken part, or other concern and enter it into the DVIR. Photographs and any pertinent information about the problem should be included in the vehicle inspection report.

Any issue that affects the safety or performance of the vehicle must be addressed before it can legally be driven.

# Walk Around The Truck



Once you're satisfied that you've checked all of the important components under the hood, it's time to do an external inspection. Leave the hood of the truck up and begin a visual inspection that includes:

- Checking all of the tires on the tractor and trailer for wear, damage, and proper air pressure.
- Inspect the electrical cord and airlines to make sure they're connected correctly.
- Make sure the 5th wheel is securely coupled to the trailer.
- Check the landing gear and make sure the legs are up and secured.
- Make sure the brake pads are in good shape and the brake indicators are positioned properly.
- Inspect the entire exterior of the tractor and trailer for dents, scratches, or other damage.

This section of the inspection process is purely visual and only takes a couple of minutes. Again, anything that isn't quite right needs to be reported so that the problem can be remedied.

## Fire Up Your Engine

Before the truck can roll out of the lot, it's imperative that the driver and fleet manager are positive that it is mechanically sound and ready to go. The only way to do that is to start the engine and make some key observations including the following:

- With the clutch depressed and the truck in neutral, start the engine.
- Observe the oil pressure and make sure the electrical system is charging.
- Gently ease off of the clutch and let the truck idle at 650 RPM.
- Double-check the gauges.
- Turn on all of the lights and flashers and climb out of the truck. Make sure all the lights are working.
- Take a look under the hood, checking for leaks and making sure belts are snug.
- Use a block of wood or other means to depress the brake pedal, make sure the lights work right.

Once you're satisfied that the engine is running the way it's supposed to, close the hood and lock it down. Report anything that needs to be addressed, such as a part replacement or repair, in the DVIR.

## Final Pre-Trip Steps

After the other criteria have been met, the next step in a Class A CDL pre-trip vehicle inspection involves moving the truck. Before you undertake this step, make sure that there are no obstructions or hazards that would prevent the truck from safely moving.

- Put the truck in reverse and back up a few feet to make sure the trailer wheels move right.
- Pull forward a few feet and use the trailer brake to stop, ensuring it's working, and the trailer is coupled.
- Pull the truck forward another few feet and use the foot brake to stop.