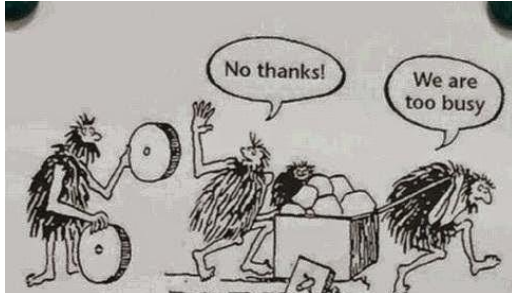


THE BIAS AGAINST PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE

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The Road Transport Industry in South Africa is often in the spotlight due to high profile accidents involving multiple fatalities. I am convinced that we are not far off from the next accident involving a heavy haul vehicle where people lose their lives. I predict this with a fair degree of certainty, and I also

predict that the calls for reform, change, better policing, route management, and all of the other stones that are regularly thrown in the aftermath of a high profile accident, would follow soon after. It has become as predictable as the sunset in this country.

The recent increase in fatalities over the festive season is a serious indicator to not only the Transport Industry, but also to the South African public. However, not much is going to change, and the upward trend in road fatalities follow pace with the increase in corrupt licensing systems, poor quality driver education and a deteriorating infrastructure.



There are separate and clearly identifiable components to the machinations that result in these statistics we are confronted with. No single person or organization is going to have the capacity to deal with each and every one of the factors that contribute to the accident rate on our roads. Within the various industries, NGO's and government departments rests sufficient capacity to attack and deal with the various components. I have written before on the lack of proper coordination between these organizations, and in that article I hinted towards the fact that little is going to change in Road Safety, unless these people get off their backsides and admit that standing together and dealing with the respective issues as a combined force is the only way of saving lives.

For my part, I believe that Preventative Maintenance Systems within the transport industry is now becoming an essential part of reducing defects, many of whom result in stranded vehicles creating a hazard for other road users. However, the bias against preventative maintenance is an obstacle which need to be overcome, and I have written about this before.



Prevention is better than cure, we often say. But when prevention takes effort and costs money, it loses its attraction as a means to save money, prevent accidents, and save lives. Are we so driven by economics that we devalue the lives of the same people we are carrying the goods for? In this respect I wish to relate to a recent incident that I was involved in, which once again highlighted to me the lack of appreciation of preventative maintenance on heavy vehicles.

I was asked to inspect 5 trucks for a contract to transport goods from Durban to one of our neighbouring countries. Upon arrival and viewing the units from a distance, I knew that this was going to be interesting. I am adding some of the pictures I took during these inspections, and to be truthfully honest, I don't care if the transport operator recognizes his trucks and wishes to sue me. I failed 4 of the trucks within the first 5 minutes of each inspection, for various reasons. Only one passed, and I commend this owner. His truck was in perfect condition, with a courteous, knowledgeable driver and assistant who was eager to help and impress, and he did.



Preventative maintenance is simple and cheap. It consists of the following basic principles:

1. A basic inspection routine. This is not the morning, or pre-trip inspection that should be performed in any case. There are clear differences between these activities, and I will write more about these differences in the future. The PMS inspection is the responsibility of the driver, and a representative from an organization who specializes in the provision of Preventative Maintenance Systems.
2. A proper reporting system where defects that are discovered are adequately captured to ensure that no defect falls through the cracks, or gets listed on a defect sheet, week after week, without any attention being given to it.
3. A management system that supports PMS, and can deal with the outcomes of inspections and services, set the systems in place to have defects repaired and seen too, and has the authority to ensure that vehicles with high level defects are not allowed to be used operationally.
4. A proper servicing regime that is integrated into the Preventative Maintenance System and which does not stand separate from it.
5. A quality management system that ensures that all work that has been done as an outflow of the PMS system and the servicing program is checked and verified before vehicles are allowed back onto our roads.
6. Finally, driver involvement and training is an absolutely essential part of any PMS system. There are various ways and levels of involvement that can be entertained, but the basics will require that driver to be involved in the lower level technical inspections that are done as part of the system.

The largest bias against PMS is the perception that it costs money. It does. Anything and everything you wish to do to increase efficiency, safety and productivity costs money. But it is money spent with the goal to save money in other areas, and the two are often not as clearly related as we wish them to be. At the risk of repeating myself, PMS creates an environment where drivers are better equipped to deal with roadside emergencies, vehicles are less prone to breaking down, and vehicles are safer, creating a reduced risk of accidents due to equipment failures. But that is not all.

PMS actively and cost effectively polices the relationship you, as an operator, has with your service providers who generally maintain your vehicles. Major financial savings can be generated from this activity, in that it ensures that quality parts are fitted, that work is properly inspected and signed off, and that

ONLY work requested is being done. This principle applies to both vehicles that are under maintenance plans, as well as ones that operate without it.

Organizations like RTMS state that in order to qualify for the benefits of RTMS Accreditation, trucks has to be roadworthy. This is not good enough. This does not save lives and curb expenses. It is time that such organizations that nobly support the industry, receive a higher degree of support from government, and that they insist on higher criteria for companies to receive accreditation, and the resultant benefits. One such criteria should clearly be the implementation of a Preventative Maintenance System.

Lets us help each other to help ourselves, and then to help our loved ones stay safe on our roads. We can work together to this goal, if we look past our personal biases, and seek a common future.