

REDUCING RISKS: An Insurance Perspective

Engine Data is a Valuable Resource



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What do you really know about how your fleet is performing? Do you know how much fuel your trucks burned idling last month? Were your drivers using cruise control to its fullest to save fuel? Are they following other vehicles too closely and slamming on their brakes to avoid accidents? Are they shifting properly to optimize fuel mileage and reduce equipment wear?

Finding the answers to these questions is easy. All this information, plus a lot more, is recorded by your truck's Engine Control Module (ECM) and/or Event Data Recorder (EDR). For a relatively small investment you can access this information and use it to help you save money through improved fuel mileage, reduced equipment wear and tear, and fewer accidents.

GETTING THE DATA

There are three common ways to retrieve engine data. One way is to use a laptop computer, along with an adapter cable and the engine manufacturer's software, to download the data. These components will allow you to access your vehicle's ECM/EDR data anytime you want. It will also allow you to set parameters such as the speed governor setting, over-speed limits and hard brake application thresholds.

The second option is to install on-dash displays inside the cab. Each engine manufacturer has its own system. Parameters can be set for each vehicle or driver to help monitor and improve performance. These devices provide immediate feedback for determining how your drivers are "measuring up."

Lastly, mobile communication devices such as QualComm, PeopleNet or GeoManager can also be used. This equipment is more costly than the other two options, but it allows you to access the information in "real time" through Web-based applications. They also offer other benefits, including global positioning and communications with drivers. Costs for this equipment generally range from \$1,000 to \$2,500 plus a monthly service fee. However, some providers offer monthly lease arrangements that can make this technology affordable even for small fleets.

USING THE DATA

The ECM/EDR holds an array of information that can help you maximize fuel mileage, reduce equipment wear and improve safety, including:

- Idle time statistics
- Trip mileage and fuel economy
- Cruise control use
- Top speed and time spent traveling at various speeds
- Highest RPM and number of engine over-speeds
- Hard brake applications
- Gear usage

Begin by establishing a base line for vehicle and driver performance by monitoring your trucks for several weeks to determine benchmarks for good, average and inadequate performance. For example, if trucks in your fleet are averaging 6.2 miles per gallon and idling 28 percent of the time, a truck idling less and achieving higher fuel efficiency is performing better than average. Likewise, if trucks in your fleet are averaging one hard brake application per quarter, then a driver who has ten hard brake incidents in a month may be driving too aggressively and might pose an increased risk of being involved in an accident.

After determining what criteria constitutes acceptable and unacceptable performance, determine how often the information should be reviewed. The following table provides some general guidance.

	MINIMUM	BEST PRACTICE
NEW OR INEXPERIENCED DRIVERS	Monthly for first 3 months	Weekly for first month, biweekly for rest of first quarter, quarterly for remainder of first year
CURRENT DRIVER WITH A CLEAN SAFETY RECORD	Annually	Quarterly
CURRENT DRIVER WITH MOVING VIOLATIONS AND/OR ACCIDENTS	Quarterly	Monthly
CURRENT DRIVER WITH PREVIOUSLY NOTED ECMS ISSUES	Bi-monthly	Monthly

SAFETY

The data available from your truck's ECM/EDR can help you identify which drivers in your fleet are driving safely, and it can help reduce accidents. Studies have shown that when drivers know they are being monitored, accident rates decline.

Two important performance indicators to monitor are speed and the frequency of hard brake applications. Through the truck's ECM/EDR, you can monitor how fast your trucks are traveling and whether drivers are following your company's speed policies. You also have control over each vehicle's speed governor setting. You can adjust this setting to help ensure your trucks are not traveling at excessive speeds. The frequency of hard brake applications can tell you if your drivers are maintaining a safe following distance or driving aggressively. Drivers with a high frequency of hard brake applications may be taking unnecessary risks.

ACCIDENTS

Can this information be used against you? It can in some situations, but it can also help you prove your driver's innocence if he or she did not cause an accident.

It has become common to use ECM/EDR data following serious truck accidents. As a result, even if you do not use this information, other parties may use it, even if you don't want them to.

Every accident involves unique circumstances. Because of the complexities involved, consult with your attorney or claim representative to determine whether ECM/EDR data should be downloaded following a serious accident.

CONCLUSION

To remain competitive in today's trucking industry, fleet owners and managers must take advantage of all available resources. This includes using technology that is readily available through your truck's engine computer. This information can help improve efficiency and give you assurance that your trucks are being operated safely.

It might be hard to put a price tag on the potential benefits, but for the cost of replacing a couple of tires or paying your insurance deductible for one preventable accident, you could purchase the equipment you need to improve fuel mileage, reduce equipment wear and tear, and potentially avoid accidents.

Engine Manufacturer Information:

Talk to your truck dealer about accessing your fleet's engine data. Additional information is available at the engine manufacturer websites, listed below.

■ CUMMINS

Insite

http://insite.cummins.com/information_en.html

PowerSpec

<http://www.powerspec.cummins.com/>

RoadRelay

<http://www.roadrelay.cummins.com/>

■ CATERPILLER

Truck Engine Call Center: 1-800-447-4986

■ DETROIT DIESEL

Information Management Products

http://www.detroitdiesel.com/products/electronics/Info_Management_Products/

■ MACK

InfoMax Wireless

<http://www.macktrucks.com/default.aspx?pageid=944>

■ VOLVO

Trip Manager

http://www.volvo.com/trucks/na/en-us/business_tools/performance_tracking/

Note: Engine data availability varies by manufacturer.

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