Safety inspection and repair facilities

This section covers the facilities needed to undertake safety inspections and the arrangements needed if you do not undertake your own inspections. The same guidance applies to the repair of any defects found during safety checks.

If you are an operator, you must decide whether to undertake your own safety inspection and maintenance work in-house or to contract all or part of the work to someone else.

Own safety inspection facilities

If you decide to provide your own safety inspection facilities, you must ensure that they are adequate for the job.

Facilities should ideally include:

- Undercover accommodation for the largest vehicle in the fleet. This is required to ensure that safety checks can be conducted satisfactorily in all weathers
- Tools and equipment appropriate to the size and nature of the fleet;
- An adequate under-vehicle inspection facility. Ramps, pits or hoists may not be needed if the vehicles have enough ground clearance for a proper inspection to be made on hard standing;
- Adequate lighting;
- Access to brake test equipment (e.g. a roller brake tester, decelerometer);
- Access to headlamp test equipment;
- Access to engine exhausts emission test equipment;
- Access to steam or pressure under-vehicle washing facilities; and
- A safe working environment.

For older diesel engined vehicles a smoke meter should be used to ensure that the level of exhaust smoke is within the legal requirements.

Operators should have access to a brake tester for the purpose of checking braking efficiency. While a decelerometer may be adequate for some vehicles the use of a roller brake tester is strongly advised.

A roller brake test is an important indicator of braking efficiency, although not a substitute for regular and proper maintenance.

Contracted-out arrangements

If you decide to use a contractor, you are still responsible for the condition of vehicles that are inspected and/or maintained for you by your agents or contractors.

Care must be taken to ensure that the facilities used by the contractor are adequate and that the staff are competent. The list of facilities can be used to check a contractor. You should also ascertain that the contractor is in possession of an inspection manual and has suitable inspection sheets.

Drawing up a contract

It is essential to have a written contract that sets out precise details of vehicles covered and frequency and type of check, along with a repair policy. Such a contract must be provided to support an application for an operator's licence. If a contract is cancelled, or the terms of an existing contract are changed, a copy of the new agreement must be sent to the VOSA Central Licensing Office without delay.

Contract limitations

Even when a maintenance contract exists between you (the operator) and a contractor, you remain legally responsible for the condition of the vehicle, the authorisation of any report work undertaken and the retention of records. You need to be satisfied at all times that the level of maintenance agreed matches the demands placed upon vehicles and that the standards achieved by the contractor are kept at a sufficiently high level. You should therefore talk regularly with the contractor to ensure that they are familiar with the operational needs of the vehicles they are required to inspect and repair. This knowledge is important if the contractor is to be called upon to advise on a particular course of action – particularly when your technical know-how is limited.

Even when you get on well with a contractor, you should have a system for regularly monitoring the quality of work done. Obtaining first time pass rate annual test data from the contractor is one way of checking that their

performance is satisfactory, but this should be supplemented by other checks. Any sign of unreliability, incompetence or other shortcomings causing a reduction in the standards achieved should receive prompt attention. Here again a good working relationship can help, but if problems persist you may well consider a change of contractor.

Roadside safety inspections

Only emergency repairs may be done at the roadside. Routine maintenance, including safety inspections and repairs, may not be carried out on the public highway.

Planning a safety inspection programme

Safety inspections must be planned in advance. Vehicles that are subject to a statutory annual test may have their year's programme planned around the anticipated test date to avoid duplication of work associated with the test, such as cleaning and major servicing.

A simple method of drawing up a programme is to use a year planner or flow chart. Computer based systems are equally acceptable, and electronic vehicle maintenance management and storage systems available often incorporate an electronic planning feature. The information should be kept in the simplest form possible and displayed prominently. This will serve as a reminder of programmed inspections or of any changes that have been necessary.

All vehicles subject to programmed attention should be included. Ideally planners or charts should be used to set safety inspection dates at least six months in advance. Vehicles' test dates should be included, as should servicing and other ancillary equipment or calibration dates, e.g. tachograph, lifting equipment, etc.

The planner should be updated regularly indicating the progress of the programme recording any extra work carried out. Vehicles that have been taken off the operator's licence or other vehicles temporarily off-road should have their period of non-use identified, and a note should be made when vehicles have been disposed of.

The planner or chart may be used to record other items in the vehicle maintenance programme, such as servicing, unscheduled work and refurbishing. Each activity should be clearly identified.

http://www.dft.gov.uk/vosa/repository/Guide%20to%20Maintaining%20Roadworthiness%20%20Proposed%20New%20Edition.doc.