

Carriers Undeterred by EOBR Delay



Trucking companies are purchasing electronic onboard recorders because of the data the devices can generate, including precise reporting of driver hours.

Companies Adopt Electronic Onboard Recorders Despite Court Reversal of Federal Mandate

By Dan Calabrese
Contributing Writer

Despite a federal appellate court ruling tossing out a new mandate that would eventually have required all motor carriers to install electronic onboard recorders in their vehicles, several fleets said they would press forward with their plans to add the devices.

The 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in August threw out a Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration rule that eventually would have required most cargo haulers to install EOBRs in truck cabs. The court rejected the rule on grounds that the devices could be used to harass drivers (TRANSPORT TOPICS, 9-5, p. 1).

But Jeff Lester, chief risk officer for Dallas-based Greatwide Logistics Services, which ranks No. 20 on the TRANSPORT TOPICS Top 100 list of the largest U.S. and Canadian for-hire carriers, said, "The court's decision on EOBRs

has no bearing on our position to invest in this tool. The value proposition of EOBRs extends well beyond [hours-of-service] compliance." Indeed, while the rule has been vacated — at least temporarily — there's nothing to stop fleets from voluntarily adopting policies that require drivers to use EOBRs.

Meanwhile, a consortium of technology vendors that has been working with FMCSA on how to implement the rule plans to continue its work under the assumption — which is shared by many fleets — that some form of the rule eventually will take effect.

The rule was to take effect in June 2012, first for about 5,700 carriers with spotty safety records, and later more broadly across the industry. It has been estimated that the process of amending the rejected proposal could take as long as 18 to 24 months.

The delay also doesn't matter to Phoenix-based Swift Transportation, said Richard Stocking, the company's president and chief operating officer. That's because the carrier,

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Fleets See Greater Productivity, Profits From Refrigerated Trailer Tracking

By Eric Brothers
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When Stevens Transport Inc. went looking for a tracking system for its refrigerated trailers, at the top of its wish list was technology that not only would send a report about problems with the reefer but also would allow the company to take care of the trouble on the fly.

"We have been seeking a provider who was capable of two-way control of the temperature settings," said Scott Mellman, the Dallas-based carrier's director of logistics. "Knowing that a trailer was inadvertently set at the wrong

temperature was nice to know, but being able to react and correct it in real time is the key."

Stevens Transport, No. 44 on the TRANSPORT TOPICS Top 100 list of the largest U.S. and Canadian for-hire carriers, currently is testing StarTrak Information Technologies' trailer devices on 100 of its 3,500 refrigerated trailers, Mellman said. The devices, he said, provide inventory management data such as dwell time, temperature history, alerts (fuel level low, rapid fuel loss, bad sensors), reefer settings (start/stop or cycle sentry) and transport refrigeration unit (TRU) engine hours — information useful for maintenance planning.

Mellman said he values the technology's ability to take commands, as well

as its reporting capability — and he is leveraging the data to obtain extraordinary operational insights.

"We utilize ambient temperatures relative to humidity to calculate reefer fuel burn per hour at different temperature settings," Mellman explained.

Although the use of reefer tracking often is driven by customer policies and government regulations that require certain loads to be temperature monitored, carrier and tech company executives said the accumulation of ancillary data from these devices — such as fuel use, maintenance alerts and asset utilization — can help improve a fleet's bottom line, which is the driving force behind the interest in the technology.

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