



The Oregonian

Faked logs, violations stall scofflaw truckers

Traffic check - State police pull over drivers and cite infractions in eastern Oregon

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FAREWELL BEND -- Oregon State Police cited a 63-year-old trucker Thursday for doing the impossible: driving 500 miles in five hours through three states in an 18-wheeler refrigerator truck full of meat.

He might have gotten away with his high-speed claim, had he not been swept into a 72-hour "trucker check" along Interstate 84 in eastern Oregon.

Troopers cited the Utah-based driver at Oregon's Port of Entry at Farewell Bend. Sgt. Alan Hageman said the bogus feat was recorded in the driver's logbook to conceal the fact that he'd been driving longer than the 11 hours allowed truckers in any 24-hour period.

The driver merely wanted to keep going, Hageman said. But had he kept on, he might have become drowsy and wrecked his 80,000-pound rig along the freeway, perhaps injuring or killing himself and someone else. Troopers fined him \$367 and put his truck out of service for 10 hours so he could get some sleep.

"We're seeing more of it," especially among drivers paid by the hour or the mile, said Hageman, who has spent 24 years with the state police. There's an inducement for drivers to be as productive as possible, he said, which can mean driving a lot more hours than they are allowed by law.

The around-the-clock check began at 12:01 a.m. Tuesday and was to end at midnight Thursday. Organized by state police and the Oregon Department of Transportation, its goal was to reel in trucks with worn suspensions, frayed tires, bad brakes and long-haul commercial drivers who were drowsy, drunk or drugged. Troopers with narcotics dogs also circled each parked truck to make sure illegal drugs weren't being transported.

An estimated 10,000 vehicles a day pass the state-run port of entry on I-84 between Ontario and Baker City. Forty-five percent are trucks, and most of them are big, diesel-burning tractor-trailer rigs.

By noon Thursday, four big rigs were parked with green tags in their windows, dedaring them "out of service." Final numbers won't be in until next week, but during a similar operation last September at Cascade Locks, 11 percent of the 512 trucks inspected were placed out of service for safety violations and 19 percent of drivers ordered out of service for other infractions.

By midday Thursday, inspectors also were seeing more than the usual number of faulty brakes, worn-out tires and mushy suspensions. Police suspect companies are skimping on maintenance and repairs to make up for \$4-a-gallon diesel prices.

Possibly more ominous is an apparent drug problem among some commercial drivers. Police estimate that as many as 10 percent have controlled substances in their systems.

"Marijuana and methamphetamines are what we see most, and prescription drugs," Hageman said.

In all, police cited five people for driving while under the influence of alcohol or intoxicants by noon Thursday. Three were commercial drivers and two were in autos.

During a similar truck check at Farewell Bend last September, 468 commercial drivers provided voluntary urine samples. Tests found 8.7 percent tested positive for at least one drug.

Perhaps surprisingly, the check was welcomed by some drivers.

"It's a good thing," said Bill Smith, 57, of Georgia. "It gets some of those idiots off the road."

Commercial drivers are a mix "of some of the best people you'll ever want to meet, and some of the worst," Smith, a commercial driver for 38 years, said. "Some of them are in their own world, and just not thinking. This job requires a lot of common sense."

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