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# »» MOVING ON »»

Issue 13 November 2005

The newsletter for HGV and PSV operators

## A clear view of overloading

*During the last six months we have been involved in a trial to investigate the viability of linking automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) and weigh-in-motion sensors (WIMS) technology for enforcement purposes.*

This trial was the first of its kind within the UK and involved the Highways Agency (HA), VOSA, the Central Motorway Police Group (CMPG) and the Department for Transport.

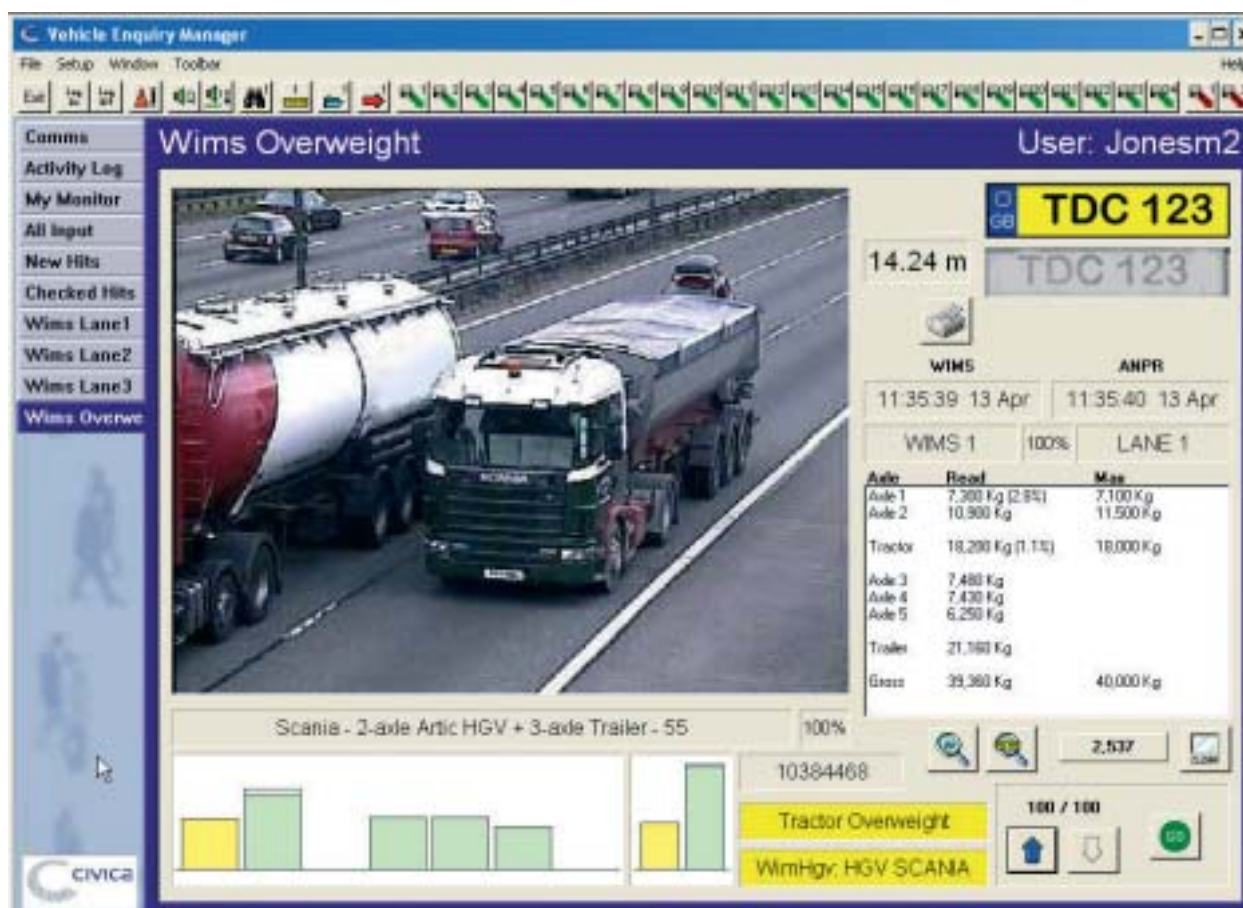
The trial was designed to gauge the equipment's usefulness in allowing us to identify overloading offenders more easily. We hoped to achieve more effective use of VOSA's resources and, at the same time, reduce the burden on compliant operators by focusing mainly on potential offenders. There are also knock-on effects for the HA in the shape of reduced abnormal carriageway erosion and incident-related congestion.

### How accurate is the equipment?

One of the trial's main objectives was to focus on the equipment's accuracy, both in its ability to identify correctly vehicles' registered numbers and its ability to weigh those vehicles within acceptable enforcement tolerances. When vehicle test results were analysed and compared with dynamic axle weighbridge readings, we found extremely high accuracy levels, unsurpassed by any other weigh-in-motion equipment used by VOSA:

- Of the 271 vehicles identified by the equipment as being overloaded during organised road checks, **all** were overweight and 204 were overweight to the extent that they were prohibited.

These figures provide conclusive proof that this ANPR/WIMS installation gives VOSA enough targeting capability to ensure that a significant percentage of vehicles selected for weighing are actually



overloaded. In addition to this, 52 drivers were prohibited for instances of serious drivers' hours breaches, and 44 prohibitions were issued for various mechanical defects.

### Effective vehicle weight enforcement

Early analysis of the ANPR/WIMS equipment trial results undoubtedly shows that the combined technology provides VOSA with a highly effective targeting tool for vehicle weight enforcement. There is a vast difference between the levels of effectiveness in the trial weighing and those from the most recent period of pre-ANPR/WIMS implementation. The

project's leader, Gordon Macdonald, said: "These results prove conclusively that combined ANPR and WIMS installations provide a stunningly effective targeting tool. We have now identified four further strategically located sites for installation over the next year or so."



## From the editor



Welcome to *Moving On 13*. As usual, this issue brings you all the latest developments from VOSA and contributing agencies.

You may be interested to know about a new computer programme that we are currently developing with our IT partner Atos Origin. The programme will allow VOSA Examiners to connect wirelessly to a central database and find out information about operators, vehicles and drivers at the roadside. Want to find out more? Then turn to page 4.

Did you know that in 2004 there were around 17,000 HGVs in the UK without a Vehicle Excise Licence? Find out how VOSA and DVLA are working together to reduce this. Turn to page 7 to see how you can help.

**Remember to keep your comments coming in to Claire Buckley, *Moving On*, VOSA, Berkeley House, Croydon Street, Bristol BS5 0DA, or email [movingon@vosa.gov.uk](mailto:movingon@vosa.gov.uk)**

## Heavy vehicle wheel detachment

*The Department for Transport has awarded TRL a contract to investigate incidents of wheel detachment from heavy vehicles.*

Detachment of wheels from vehicles, particularly heavy commercial vehicles, has been a cause of concern for many years and there has been a considerable amount of investigative work and comment on the subject.

When a wheel becomes detached from an HGV it may simply come to rest without causing any further damage or harm. However, in the wrong circumstances it can collide with other vehicles or road users and cause an accident – in some cases this has resulted in fatalities. Typically, it is only the most serious accidents which occur as a result of wheel detachment that are identified by standard reporting mechanisms.

### New research objectives

The objectives of this new research are to:

- identify the current frequency of wheel detachment in the UK and analyse the trend over time. This will involve carrying out a survey with VOSA and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), comparable with the one conducted in 1997, as well as reviewing existing accident and defect databases;
- gather information on the scale of the wheel detachment problem in other EU member states;
- survey the views of heavy vehicle drivers, operators (including wheel and tyre maintenance contractors), and manufacturers (of vehicles, wheel fixings and wheel nut retention/indication devices) about heavy vehicle wheel detachment, locking wheel nuts/studs, and nut movement indication devices;



- identify current wheel fixing standards and current best practice in wheel nut/stud tightening methods; and
- provide a preliminary cost-benefit analysis for equipping the UK heavy vehicle fleet with wheel locking and indication devices.

### What happens next?

The project is due to report its findings in March 2006. Depending on the results, the Department for Transport may choose to commission a second stage of research to assess the capability and effectiveness of alternative wheel locking and/or indication devices through a programme of physical testing.

### What you can do now

You don't need to wait for the research findings. Wheel nut indication and locking devices are available. It makes sense to use them.

## VOSA e-test booking system

*VOSA began to introduce a new e-test booking system into its test stations on 30 August.*

Technical issues with the new system have led to difficulties for customers and VOSA staff in making bookings. We are working with our IT partners, Atos Origin, to resolve the issues with the new system.

Jeremy Rolstone, VOSA's Customer Service Director, said: "VOSA is very aware of the inconvenience this is causing. A solution is being put in place to maintain our service levels and the availability of tests as our top priority. Over the next few weeks we will

resolve outstanding administration. We apologise for any inconvenience caused and thank our customers for their patience and support."

E-test bookings, when fully introduced, will give customers the additional service of direct booking via the internet, including paying by debit/credit card. It will provide a more consistent booking service and application of booking policies as well as greater choice and flexibility for customers.

# Seat belts in HGVs

*VOSA will soon be amending the test of seat belts within the Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGV) Inspection Manual.*

The current HGV Inspection Manual already refers to seat belt requirements for mini-articulated vehicles. These fall under the Goods Vehicles (Plating and Testing) Regulations 1988. There are no changes to the requirements for these vehicles.

For all other HGVs (goods vehicles with a DGW of over 3,500kg), vehicles first used from 1 October 2001 need to have seat belts fitted. Section 3 of the HGV Inspection Manual is therefore being amended accordingly.

HGVs used before 1 October 2001 do not need to have seat belts, but if they are fitted they are subject to test and the vehicle will fail if they are defective.

## What will be checked?

The test method and failure items have been, as far as possible, standardised with other vehicle tests (car, light goods and public service vehicles).

## When will all this happen?

VOSA plans to introduce the seat belts check on 1 January 2006 on an advisory basis only. This means operators and presenters will be advised of any defect, rather than the vehicle being failed. This advisory period will last until 1 April 2006. After this, vehicles with seat belt defects will fail the test.

## VOSA will check:

- Presence and type – is the right type of belt fitted?
- Anchorage points – is there excessive corrosion, serious deterioration or fractures around seat belt anchorage points?
- Locking mechanisms (including buckles, stalks, retracting mechanism and fittings) – does the locking mechanism work correctly, do inertia-type belts retract and are flexible stalks undamaged or not corroded?
- Condition of the webbing – are there cuts, fraying or poor stitching?
- Seat belt fittings – are there structural weakness in guides/pivots, etc?
- Seat condition (if the seat belt is anchored to the seat) – is the seat secure and are there fractures in the frame?



# Meet the new Traffic Officers

*Highways Agency Traffic Officers are now patrolling motorways in the South East and the West Midlands. They will be introduced across the country by summer 2006 to help tackle congestion.*

## Who are Traffic Officers?

Traffic Officers are highly trained professionals who patrol the motorways to help keep traffic moving near incidents and make your journey as safe and reliable as possible. The Traffic Officer Service has been developed with the police to give them more time to tackle crime.

## What do Traffic Officers do?

Traffic Officers will help HGVs move on quickly after an incident and can particularly help HGV drivers by protecting them if they have to use the hard shoulder.

Traffic Officers have helped a lot in the West Midlands since their introduction at the end of April 2004. They have handled



more than 10,000 emergency roadside telephone calls from drivers of broken-down vehicles or from distressed motorists and have been at more than 20,000 incidents, including breakdowns, debris clearance and major incidents. In May 2005 they dealt with an average of 106 incidents every day in the West Midlands alone.

# Computers at the roadside

*VOSA, in association with its IT partner Atos Origin, is developing a new computer system for VOSA Examiners to use during their roadside enforcement work.*



The new programme is being developed with a mobile enforcement workforce in mind and VOSA Enforcement staff have been closely involved. The programme runs on a robust handheld computer that will withstand the rigours of a roadside environment. VOSA Enforcement staff will be able to connect wirelessly to a central database to get up-to-date information about operators, vehicles and drivers at the roadside and during the vehicle encounter.

The new hand-held mobile compliance device will allow VOSA Enforcement Officers to capture vehicle and operator encounter details and provide, where available, on-the-spot information about the vehicle, operator and driver.

## What are the benefits?

The main benefit of the new mobile compliance system will be the availability, accuracy and speed of data on vehicle encounters.

It can be used for future enforcements. It will link to other initiatives and:

- allow digital tachograph data to be downloaded and analysed at the roadside;
- verify vocational driver smartcards;
- hold the software for dealing with the new fixed penalty system; and
- provide a platform for targeted and digital tachograph enforcement and fixed penalties.

## Ensuring best performance

The device will only run the new mobile compliance application. All other functions will be removed. This is to ensure best performance and to comply with security requirements. The intention is to equip all Enforcement Officers who routinely conduct roadside activities.



# Agricultural tractors — operator and driver licensing

*There is a misconception that if an agricultural tractor cannot go faster than 25 mph, it will be automatically exempt from goods vehicle operator licensing.*

This is only true if the vehicle is used primarily for agriculture, horticulture or forestry and is not being used to carry or haul goods in competition with the haulage industry. It is the use of the vehicle – not the vehicle itself – that matters. If a tractor:

- is being used regularly on public roads and as a goods vehicle;
  - has an unladen weight of over 1,525kg; or
  - is covering distances of over 15 miles (24.135 km)
- then an operator's licence may be needed.

## What licence do I need?

A tractor with two or more axles, made primarily for work off the road and being used for agriculture, horticulture or forestry, can be driven by someone with an 'F' category driving licence. However, when a tractor is used for any other purpose and driven primarily on the road, the driver must hold, depending on the vehicle's weight, a category 'B', 'C1' or 'C' category driving licence, with the added '+E' entitlement if towing a trailer. (Leaflet D100, available from post offices, gives more information on driving licences.)

# Free software that saves your fleet cash

*The Small Fleet Performance Management Tool is designed to help truck operators analyse efficiency and improve operations.*

The toolkit itself is a simple spreadsheet for logging and reporting essential fleet information with a manual that explains how it all works. It's easy to use, delivers real cost savings and it's free!

## What are the benefits?

Produced for the Department for Transport's Freight Best Practice programme and endorsed by the Freight Transport Association and the Road Haulage Association, the system is already being used by hundreds of operators. Over half say it has helped them make long-term improvements, with cost savings of between 3 and 4 per cent. That can be as much as £1,000 a week for even a relatively small fleet! Neil Morris from Freshfield Lane Brickworks said: "I'll be filling in the spreadsheet every Monday from now on. It takes a little time to get the information together but it's definitely worth the effort."

## How does the software work?

There are 22 key performance indicators (KPIs) used in the tool. They cover the most important aspects of operating a small to medium-sized truck fleet, namely:

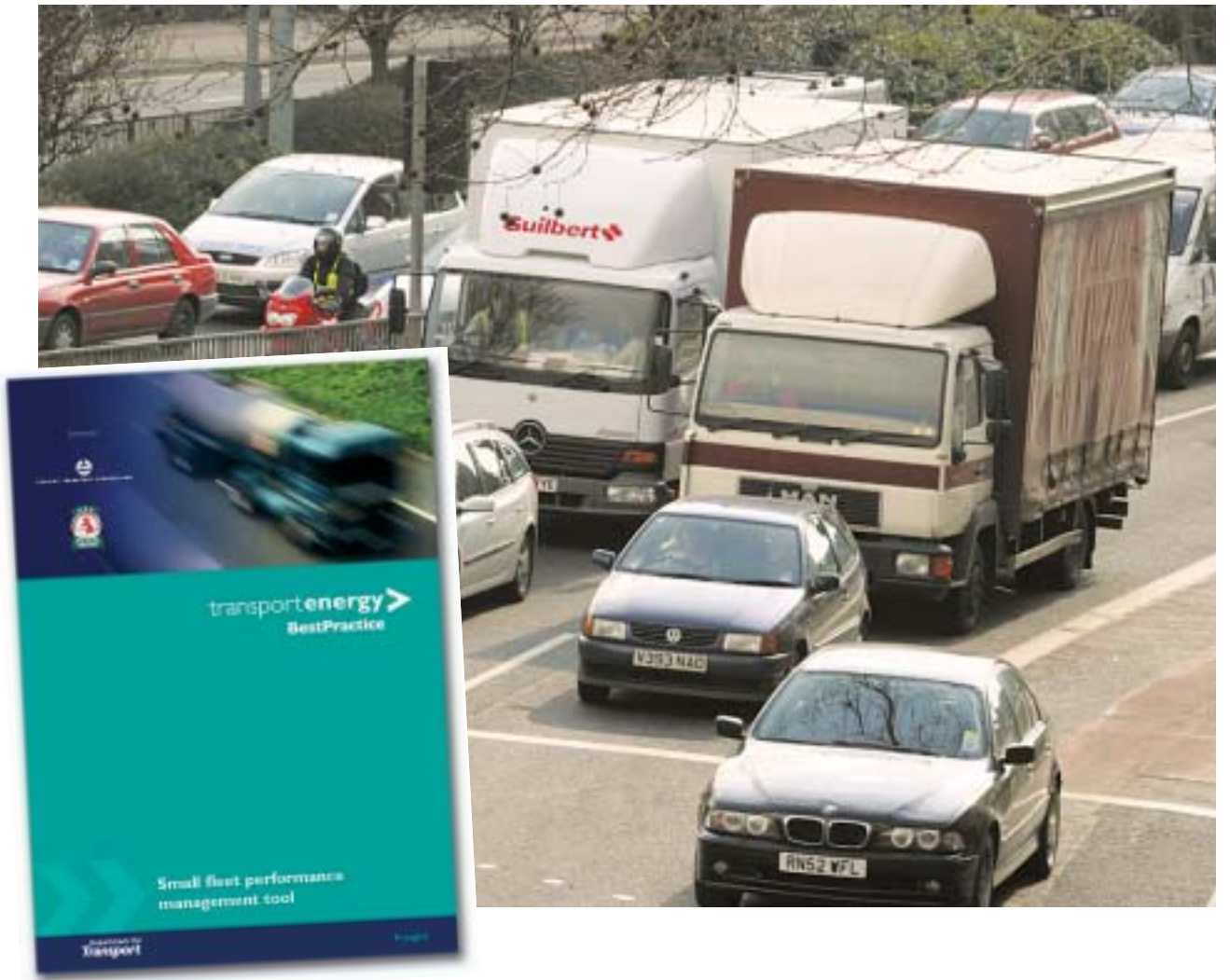
- costs;
- operational efficiency;
- customer service;
- legal compliance; and
- maintenance.

The Microsoft® spreadsheet works on any computer running Windows 95 or later and Excel 97 or later. After the initial set-up, information is entered every week and the spreadsheet then automatically produces weekly, monthly and annual reports. These build to display trends and changes as charts and graphs, so you can easily monitor performance and set targets for improvements.

Performance management rewards include:

- reduced fuel use;
- improved operational efficiency;
- higher service levels;

## → Freight Best Practice



- increased customer loyalty; and
- greater staff retention.

Every business is different so it is totally up to you to decide on and set the targets. Performance management is a long-term commitment and needs a structured approach, but the rewards can be well worth it.

To get your free copy of the Small Fleet Performance Management Tool, telephone the Freight Best Practice programme Hotline now on **0845 602 1425**. You can also download it from the programme's website: **www.freightbestpractice.org.uk**

## Other free information

Freight Best Practice provides free information to help freight operators save money through improved fleet efficiency. Funded by the Department for Transport, it offers a range of free guides, case studies, newsletters, videos and software tools showing how to:

- reduce fuel use;
- develop staff skills;

- choose and use the best equipment and systems; and
- measure, monitor and achieve targets for operational performance.

Freight Best Practice offers something to owners, directors, managers and drivers. Products are available by calling the order Hotline on **0845 602 1425** or by visiting **www.freightbestpractice.org.uk**

**Performance measures, or KPIs, are essential tools to help manage a business effectively. IF YOU DON'T MEASURE IT, YOU CAN'T MANAGE IT! Examples of KPIs include average miles per gallon, maintenance costs and the average cost of delivering a load.**

**If you monitor this information you can understand business costs and focus on maximising profitability.**

## Brake testing developments

*VOSA has been concerned for some time about how the state of loading affects the brake test. So we are looking into what differences it makes.*

We have analysed the results of around 10,000 brake tests (approximately 1 week's tests). This showed that unladen vehicles (ie weighing less than 65 per cent of the Design Gross Weight) are twice as likely to fail the test as laden ones. We are not sure, at the moment, why. It could be that the load-sensing valves do not open enough to enable the vehicle to pass the test. Or it could be that vehicles that are presented for test unladen are less likely to have been fully prepared for test.

### Load up!

Operator organisations have commented on the discrepancies between our tests and tests on the same vehicles carried out by operators during maintenance. Our investigations suggest that a difference in load is a significant factor. The message for operators has to be, therefore, to load vehicles for test wherever possible, as this will give a more meaningful test and reduce the chance of unnecessary fails. As part of our stations' equipment replacement programme, VOSA intends to install higher-capacity load simulators so that fewer vehicles have to bring their own load with them.

### Testing twice

We have started to investigate the issue further. This will involve vehicles and trailers being tested twice, once laden and once unladen, so we can quantify the difference. At first we will concentrate on tri-axle semi-trailers because most are currently tested unladen. We want to cover as wide a range of operators as possible. We will invite operators to submit their trailers for test twice (once in their normal test condition, and again, within a couple of days, in the other state of loading). We are willing to pay £250 a trailer to cover operator costs, and undertake that we will not change a test result from a pass to a fail because of the second test.



## Aim right!

*Headlamp aim is still the main reason why commercial vehicles fail their annual test. One reason might be that fitters replace headlamp bulbs without re-checking the headlamp aim.*

All replacement bulbs must meet ECE Regulation 37 and feature an 'E' mark. This Regulation ensures that all manufacturers' bulbs are interchangeable. But all manufacturing specifications have tolerances and Regulation 37 is no exception. These tolerances mean that you cannot guarantee that any replacement bulb will give precisely the same image and aim as the one that has blown.

So we advise that you always check headlamp aim after you have replaced a bulb and re-adjust as necessary. Obviously you should use serviceable and calibrated equipment.

### Working together

If you do not have access to headlamp aim equipment don't forget that, for a small fee, VOSA can check aim for you at our sites. If you want to use this service, please make sure that adjusters are accessible and serviceable and that your driver has the tools and know-how to make those final minor adjustments.

Our colleagues in the Vehicle Certification Agency will be carrying out checks on replacement bulbs later this year. If you know

of any particular makes of bulb that are worse than others when it comes to image quality or poor aim, please let us know by emailing us, or writing (details can be found on page 2).



If we work together on the causes of headlamp aim failure at annual test, we should be able to bring down its failure rate as well as reduce the failure rate of commercial vehicles. For our part, VOSA is investing significant sums of money this year in the latest generation of headlamp aim test equipment. There will be more details on this in a later edition of *Moving On*.

# Cutting tax disc evasion

*In May 2005 a small group from VOSA and DVLA were given the task of reducing the number of heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) being used without a valid Vehicle Excise Licence (a tax disc).*

Experience has shown that untaxed vehicles are frequently unroadworthy, and often without insurance, a valid test certificate or a Goods Vehicle Operator Licence. It is also unfair to the many operators who do have valid Vehicle Excise Licences for their vehicles.

Some facts and figures:

- It is estimated that in 2004 there were 17,000 HGVs without a Vehicle Excise Licence in the UK.
- The revenue lost in 2004 from HGVs with no Vehicle Excise Licence was £9,000,000.
- Using HGVs without a valid Vehicle Excise Licence can indicate to enforcement bodies, such as VOSA and the police, that an operator is in financial difficulties. It can also indicate other potential problem areas, eg maintenance.

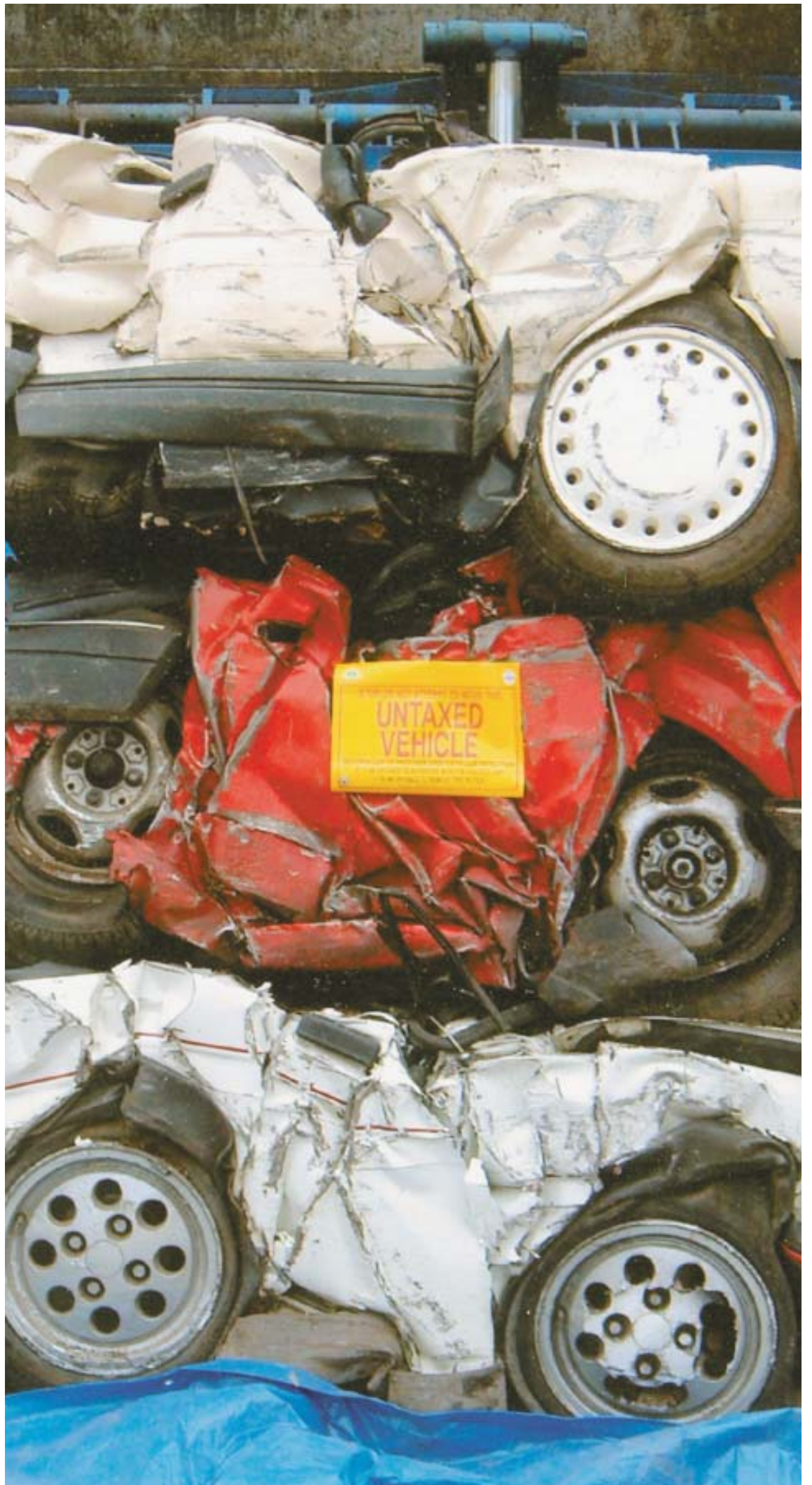
What are we doing?

As a joint working group, we are using the latest technologies to identify users of HGVs who have:

- not taxed their vehicle;
- taxed it at the wrong rate of duty;
- 'bounced' a cheque for payment of a tax disc where the disc has not been returned to the DVLA; or
- declared a SORN (Statutory Off Road Notification) but are using the vehicle on the public highway.

Operators who fail to buy a valid tax disc for their vehicles may not only be prosecuted, but may also have their vehicle wheelclamped, impounded and even crushed. Their vehicle is also more likely to be targeted by the police and enforcement agencies using the latest Automatic Number Plate Recognition equipment.

Operators without a licence may also be reported to the Traffic Commissioner in their area, in respect of their Operator Licence and their good repute. Making sure that vehicles are taxed helps to keep DVLA records up to date.



# VOSA's Vehicle Safety Branch — how you can help

*Many people are unsure of the work that goes on at our Vehicle Safety Branch (VSB). Jeff Sweeting, Head of Vehicle Safety, explains the work of the Defects and Recalls sections of the branch, and highlights what you can do to ensure your vehicle is safe.*

The Bristol-based branch handles matters relating to the inspection of vehicles involved in collisions. It also deals with design or construction defects in a wide range of automotive products such as vehicles, trailers, motorcycles, pedal cycles and the monitoring of safety recalls.



## Defects and recalls

The Defects and Recalls sections carry out their work under codes of practice. These are voluntary codes agreed with the Department for Transport (represented by VOSA) and the relevant trade associations, such as the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) and the Motor Cycle Industry Association (MCI), which represent the motor manufacturing industry.

Since 1 October 2005, the General Product Safety Regulations 2005 have provided legislative support for this work. This empowered VOSA as the enforcement authority in the automotive sector for product safety issues in the UK.

The work involves the technical assessment and analysis of some 600 to 700 reports of safety defects each year. These are reported by our own examiners and by the police, trading standards officers, members of the public, MOT testing stations, manufacturers and foreign government departments.

## What does 'defect' actually mean?

- A safety defect, as described in the code of practice, is 'a feature of design' or a 'construction that is likely to cause a significant risk of personal injury or death'.
- VSB has focused on a safety defect as one that cannot be detected by the driver or by routine maintenance before sudden and complete failure occurs, resulting in, for example, loss of control of a vehicle, or a fire.
- Defects that develop slowly and are evidential through unusual noises or marked changes in handling or performance are outside the code and are not normally taken forward.
- Defects that are the result of incorrect operation and those arising from neglect, abuse or fair wear and tear are also not normally considered.

The code of practice defect is a little different to the norm, but I hope this article will make things clearer.

## The process

Each safety defect report received by VSB is evaluated to determine its significance. Details are entered onto our computer database, which identifies any similar cases and consequent trends.

The manufacturer concerned is notified of the defect and, if necessary, asked to investigate and comment. VSB automotive engineers regularly participate in these investigations and often recommend testing methods.

The outcome of these investigations might result in:

- a change to a vehicle's design or the manufacturer's production or quality control procedures;
- the issue of a technical service bulletin to dealers and operators;
- a change in vehicle safety legislation; or
- a vehicle recall under the terms of the code of practice.

Again, our VSB engineers participate in discussions with manufacturers to ensure that the action taken to address the safety issue is appropriate.

## What happens in a recall?

When a recall is agreed the Recalls section of the branch gets into action. It is fair to say that manufacturers instigate the majority of recalls without any involvement from VSB. The branch carefully monitors the response rates to establish how many affected vehicles are satisfactorily inspected and rectified by the manufacturers' agents. The manufacturers will use their own sales

records, the DVLA computer or sometimes VOSA's records to trace the vehicles.

**Every year some 900,000 vehicles with code of practice safety defects are recalled.**

Response rates to recall notification vary, but on average around 90 per cent of affected vehicles are recalled. Vehicles miss the recall for many reasons – either they are written off, stolen, scrapped, exported or the owners just don't bother to respond to the recall notification. VSB, in conjunction with the trade associations and the Department for Transport, is continuing to explore ways of improving the recall response rate.

## How you can help us to help you

We play an important part in road safety. You can help yourselves, VOSA and manufacturers during the course of your work, drivers' reports, annual test preparation servicing or repairs.

If you come across a code of practice safety defect, or if you're unsure, let us know by:

- contacting your local Vehicle Examiner; or
- calling VSB on **0117 9543254** between 9am and 5pm. Ask to speak to one of the engineers or administration staff. We will be happy to assist.

## Agency details

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)

Drivers' enquiries  
**0870 240 0009**  
drivers.dvla@gtnet.gov.uk

Vehicle enquiries  
**0870 240 0010**  
vehicles.dvla@gtnet.gov.uk  
www.dvla.gov.uk

Driving Standards Agency (DSA)  
**0115 901 2500**  
www.dsa.gov.uk

Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA)  
**0117 951 5151**  
www.vca.gov.uk

Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA)  
**0870 60 60 440**  
www.vosa.gov.uk

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