

Vehicle fires (continued)



Manuel L. Peralta Jr.

In May of last year, my column addressed vehicle fires, a Vehicle Maintenance Bulletin (VMB) and the need to do a thorough inspection of the vehicles. I also addressed Section 736 of the *Postal Operations Manual (POM)*, explaining management's obligation to provide quality and timely maintenance of the vehicles. In August, I commented that the USPS had hired an external consulting group, Trident Engineering, to investigate vehicle fires. Separately, until a solution was discovered, I requested that each and every letter carrier conduct thorough inspections of the vehicles, with additional emphasis on looking for any fluid leaks.

On June 10, 2014, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) issued a Management Advisory Report on Delivery Vehicle Fleet Replacement. Recognizing some barriers to an immediate replacement of the fleet, the report highlights the following:

The Postal Service projected that in FY 2013 about 9 percent of the LLV fleet (nearly 13,000 vehicles) would require maintenance repairs costing more than \$6,000 per vehicle per year, or a total of over \$107 million. This represents more than 23 percent of total projected FY 2013 LLV maintenance costs. As the OIG reported in 2010, the fix as fail strategy is not cost effective for vehicles with high maintenance costs...

“Keep an extra eye on newer employees being assigned to drive a vehicle that a veteran employee has written up as unsafe.”

In August of 2014, USPS Headquarters Delivery Operations issued an instructional letter to the field advising that they are required to thoroughly examine all fuel systems for any leaks and that systems be free of corrosion during each preventative maintenance inspection. The instructions also required that all contractors be advised of these obligations so that they, too, perform the required proper inspections and follow the headquarters instructions. Do you believe that management followed these instructions in your area? If you have evidence to the contrary, please provide me the information so that we may address it here.

During the months that followed, I received a few calls

from vehicle-maintenance employees, sharing that USPS did not have an adequate supply of the proper equipment to comply with these instructions. It was further reported that management pressures vehicle maintenance employees to quickly service the vehicles, even if it means returning them to service before repairs are done properly. If you have evidence that this is taking place, please bring it to my attention.

Since November 2014, we have been requesting that the USPS provide the NALC with copies of the reports from Trident Engineering so that we may review. We then requested that the USPS provide us with their action plan based on the recommendations from Trident Engineering.

We recently discovered that the OIG has conducted an audit of scheduled vehicle maintenance. A draft copy of the report was issued to the USPS resulting in a Jan. 29 response from Vice President of Delivery Operations Ed Phelan, which includes the following:

- Management agrees that the Postal Service is not always performing scheduled preventative maintenance on its delivery vehicles in a timely manner.
- Management agrees that the Vice President, Delivery Operations, will issue a memo through the areas expressing the importance of not deferring Preventative Maintenance Inspections (PMI) and that PMIs will also be a priority of the newly structured Fleet Management group.

On Feb. 10, the OIG issued its full report, which shows that:

Management has failed in its obligations to timely complete required vehicle maintenance, that 21 percent of the vehicles in the fleet are not receiving preventive maintenance in a timely manner and that ‘maintaining scheduled maintenance is critical in avoiding vehicle breakdowns and safety issues while meeting the Postal Service’s customer service requirements.’

On April 3, USPS Fleet Manager Philip Knoll Jr. issued a directive to the Managers of Vehicle Maintenance and Managers of Vehicle Maintenance Facilities mandating compliance with VMB V-07-98.

Copies of my May and August columns, as well as the August 5, 2014, letter, the June 2014 OIG Report, the February 2015 OIG report and the April 3 letters as referenced above are available for your review and use on our website on the “Safety and Health” page in the “Vehicle safety: Vehicle fires” section.

As always, keep an eye on each other. Keep an extra eye on newer employees being assigned to drive a vehicle that a veteran employee has written up as unsafe.