

Rust is not a friend



Manuel L. Peralta Jr.

without the wheel falling off, yet the vehicle had apparently been used to deliver mail up to the time that it was taken out of service.

“The response received reaffirms the importance of proper and thorough vehicle inspections as well as appropriate vehicle maintenance.”

Many of us would have noticed the rusted wheel and would have written it up long before this vehicle was taken out of service. Many of us would have written it up even if it was not our vehicle, because that would have been the right thing to do.

Some of us would not have written it up, even if we had noticed it, because we just don't want to deal with the aggravation.

We see our newer employees being issued their vehicles at the last moment. They load their vehicle without the benefit of a thorough vehicle inspection. They are being pressured to deliver as quickly as they can and taking the time to make sure their vehicles are safe just does not fit into management's performance expectations.

The NALC recently made an inquiry to USPS seeking information as to how it is dealing with the matter addressed above. First of all, it appears that this problem is not widespread, or so it seems in Washington; however, the response received reaffirms the importance of proper and thorough vehicle inspections as well as appropriate vehicle maintenance.

Last month, I received a copy of minutes of a recent USPS-NALC Safety Task Force meeting. In my review of the minutes, my attention was drawn to a section that addressed the fact that wheel rims are rotting, rusting and splitting to the point of falling off the vehicles.

The minutes go on to recommend that we take the time to inspect wheel rims for any visible signs of cracks or damage. The photo in the minutes is not of sufficient quality to reproduce in this article; nevertheless, the subject matter should be of concern to all of us.

My reaction to the image, however, left me in disbelief that this vehicle could have moved an inch

USPS Headquarters responded with the following information: “USPS Fleet Management and Vehicle Maintenance points out that the Vehicle Maintenance Bulletin VMB-07-98 addresses this issue. They further point out that preventive maintenance inspections are designed to identify these types of issues and to initiate the repair. The issue...appears to be an anomaly. The VMF manager...has issued a memo to the fleet operations specialist...requiring him to perform a stand-up talk with all of his automotive technicians to reiterate the proper inspection of wheels in accordance with the *Vehicle Maintenance Bulletin*.”

VMB-07-98 includes the following passage in guidance for one of the vehicle categories:

“Lug nuts, wheels, hubs, and alignment (A & B) Inspect lug nuts, wheels, and hubs for tightness. Check wheels and rims for cracks, straightness, unseated locking rings, and broken or missing lugs, studs, or clamps. **Inspect for “bleeding” rust stains.** Check for loose or damaged lug nuts and elongated mounting stud holes. Use a torque wrench to re-torque the lug nuts.” (Emphasis added.)

The *Official Grumman Long Life Vehicle Operator's Manual* provides at page 5.16:

Wheel Replacement

Damaged wheels must be replaced. For example, **replace wheels if they are bent, cracked or heavily rusted or if wheel nuts often become loose.** Also replace wheels that leak air. See the Caution under “Inspection and Rotation” in this section regarding the importance of obtaining good metal-to-metal contact when replacing or changing wheels.

Do not use bent wheels which have been straightened, and do not use inner tubes in leaking wheels designed for tubeless tires. Such wheels may have structural damage and could fail without warning. (Emphasis added.)

So, why are we bringing this information to your attention?

If Fleet Management and Vehicle Maintenance had, in fact, followed the above-cited instructions, it would not have been possible for a wheel to have “rusted through,” as referenced above.

It is almost incomprehensible that no one would have noticed and written up the wheel in question prior to its reaching the state of disrepair that could have caused an accident and possibly an injury or fatality.

Keep an eye on each other.