

Vehicle safety—where’s my ride?



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Over the last few weeks, I have had a number of conversations with safety activists on the subject of vehicles in need of service or repairs where management has not promptly fixed the problems.

I have used this column frequently to preach that we need you to do a thorough inspection of your vehicles, each and every morning, so that you catch all items that need repair or service. My columns were written to address maintenance failures related to vehicle fires and other serious issues. (Review these Safety and Health articles on the NALC website: January 2013, May 2014, August 2014, June 2015 and August 2015.)

If we take the time to report vehicle defects, the vehicle should be taken out of service and sent for proper servicing through vehicle maintenance (or a contractor, if that is the arrangement in your city).

Use Form 4565 to report vehicle defects or vehicle repairs needed. The form provides a space for your supervisor to sign so that you have a receipt. Get the form signed and keep your receipt—don’t lose it. You will need it later when your supervisors deny knowledge of the defects you reported.

The *Handbook PO-701*, updated as of Oct. 23, 2008, provides that:

Fleet Management and Control - Purpose (§311)

The purpose of the maintenance program is to maintain vehicles in a mechanically reliable, safe, clean, and neat condition available for maximum mail transportation use. Accomplish this purpose in compliance with established requirements in the most economical manner possible.

The objective of the vehicle maintenance program places primary emphasis on preventing (rather than correcting) major repairs. Scheduled maintenance is prescribed to implement this objective by providing periodic, systematic examination and service of postal-owned vehicles. To accomplish this objective, **complete all required scheduled maintenance actions as prescribed in *Handbook M-4*, Vehicle Maintenance Program Guidelines, manufacturers’ manuals, and Fleet Management Bulletins, within the established cycle date and before returning the vehicle to service.** (Emphasis added.)

If management is doing its job in accordance with the above-stated purpose and objective, we should have very few items to report, as their maintenance inspections should catch everything.

OK, now the real world. Why are so many vehicles falling apart or catching fire? It’s no secret.

On Feb. 10, 2015, the USPS Office of the Inspector General issued a “management alert” to the vice president of delivery operations at USPS Headquarters, admonishing the USPS as follows:

...During the course of our Nationwide Vehicle Maintenance Facility Efficiency audit, **we determined the Postal Service is not always performing scheduled preventive maintenance on its delivery vehicles.** This occurred because of their extended use of vehicles for additional service commitments, the limited number of reserve vehicles, and delayed scheduled maintenance. Maintaining scheduled maintenance is critical to avoid vehicle breakdowns and ensure safety, while meeting the Postal Service’s customer service requirements... (Emphasis added.)

In response to the above statement, management at the headquarters level answered as follows:

“Why are so many vehicles falling apart or catching fire? It’s no secret.”

...With regard to recommendation 1, management stated they agree that the Postal Service is not always performing scheduled preventive maintenance on its delivery vehicles in a timely manner. The Vice President, Delivery Operations, will issue a memorandum through the areas expressing the importance of not deferring [Preventative Vehicle Maintenance] (PMIs) to support added delivery requirements. Management also indicated that reducing PMIs will be a priority of the newly structured Fleet Management group beginning in FY 2015, Q2...

When we find that a vehicle is re-assigned to another employee after it was written up (an unsuspecting victim—see my August 2014 column), then we must follow the trail and hold management accountable through the grievance procedure. Follow that vehicle through your investigation and find out who was responsible for allowing it to be used before it was repaired.

Form 4565 is the correct form to report vehicle defects; however, if management fails to properly service the vehicle or send it to an unsuspecting victim, we should also be filling out a Form 1767 stating that management has failed to properly service an unsafe vehicle and by so doing is placing our employees, and possibly the public, in harm’s way. If necessary, you might have to follow up with a safety grievance.