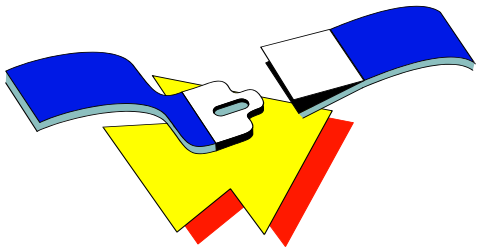
Seat Belts – Who Fixes Them?



Everyone in the company has a responsibility to insure that seat belts are installed in both over-the-road equipment, as well as off-the-road equipment.

And, this same responsibility covers the functioning of the seat belt mechanism. Seat belts, like any other part of equipment, can become defective, can have damaged parts, or in some cases is vandalized.

A shop foreman is responsible for the complete and safe functioning of every single piece of equipment owned by the company, and used in the company's day-to-day field operations (and this includes seat belts).

Perhaps the shop foreman should ask himself these questions every day:

- Have I checked all equipment that has seat belts installed at the factory to be sure that the seat belt mechanism is completed operational? Are there any defects present? Do the buckles snap into place correctly? Is the hardware that holds the seat belt to the cab housing in good condition?
- Has the seat belt been removed from the cab? Why? Do you have the proper parts for replacement?
- Are the metal portions of the seat belt rusty or inoperative? Do I know where I can get replacement parts? How quickly?
- Do I know where I can find a decal that says "SEAT BELT MUST BE WORN AT ALL TIMES BY THE OPERATOR OF THIS EQUIPMENT?
- Should I put an 'OUT OF SERVICE TAG" on both over-the-road and off-the-road equipment that have defective seat belt mechanisms, or no seat belts?

Safety Belt Quiz

While there may be no definitive guidelines provided by manufacturers regarding life expectancy of seat belts (or recommended age for replacement), here are some common-sense guidelines to use when determining the condition of seat belts in both off-the-road equipment…as well over-the-road equipment:

- Belt webbing or seat belt hardware should be replaced immediately if wear or other damage seems to indicate that total capacity to protect has been lessened.
- Sections of the webbing that make regular contact with metal hardware should be examined carefully. Continued abrasion at such vital points can weaken the fabric.
- All spring mechanisms should be checked for proper functioning.
- All metal hardware should be checked carefully for possible cracks or damaged areas.
- Check to see whether the webbing slips under tension at buckles or other attachment points.

- Rust totally destroys the structural integrity of any seat belt mechanism. Replace the entire front seat belt mechanism, including attachment bolts.

- If the seat belt fabric is stained, or contaminated with grease, solvents, gasoline or other types of caustic chemicals, replace the entire seat belt mechanism.

How do seat belts become defective? Weather. Outdoor exposure. Sun exposure. Abrasion. Rubbing against sharp particles. Twisting. Forcing the buckles. Abuse.

How is this determined? When the rescue squad arrives at the scene, where there has been an accident and serious injury or death has occurred, one of the first things the rescue squad personnel (or police) check is to determine if a seat belt was used and what was its condition?

Do seat belts fail? In other words, have there been cases where investigation shows that the seat belts either "failed" or they had obvious major physical defects? YES! And accident investigations, when this occurs, usually prove conclusively that seat belt failure was a contributing factor to the injury or death.