

Technology and Maintenance Council (TMC) Annual Meeting Recap

February 2020 Atlanta, Georgia

TMC is a collaboration of Fleets, original equipment manufacturers and service providers. This year's attendance was a collection of the above, totaling 4,249.

The purpose of TMC is to provide to the industry "recommended practices" (RP's). To do this, TMC has put together task force groups to study a particular service item of a truck. The task forces are broken down by segment of the truck they are dealing with. For example, tires, electrical, engines and chassis to name are just a few of the topics discussed by the 16 task forces that are established. I tend to spend most of my time, but not all, in the chassis section. In that chassis section are 62 active RP's.

All the task forces have a similar number of RP's in their respective groups. As new technology of trucks come into play in the maintenance of said vehicle, RP's are generated to do proper maintenance on that segment. Otherwise, the current RP's are no longer valid due to upgrades in that area, then those RP's become obsolete.

I will offer a simple overview of the meeting to give you some understanding of what transpires during these sessions.

In the chassis section, the big topic is all the electronic mitigation systems now on board. For our industry, this is a big deal. As small as a 1-2-degree change in vehicle ride height, front or rear or anything, may change the center line of the vehicle. Plus, a small difference in tire diameter from one side to the other could do this. Depending what system, lane deviation for instance, the change in angles will cause a need to recalibrated, and a surprising number of service providers are not aware of this. Nor do they understand what procedure is needed to do the recalibration, but usually involves software and a particular method of operation of the vehicle during a test drive. Not doing the recalibration can lead to serious consequences. There are a few systems in the marketplace, and hopefully more to come, that can recalibrate certain mitigations systems automatically. Be sure you have that system.

Welding on frames or crossmembers - We all know that welding a frame is not a preferred method of repair. Yet there are some instances, such as frame lengthening or shortening, that may dictate some welding, as vehicles are manufactured these days to be lighter. The alloys in the steel making up the frames has changed. The old reliable welding rods may not be compatible anymore with those alloys in frame material and cause poor welding results. Lighter frames vibration becomes an issue.

Frame bolts, huck type vs. grade 8 type - They are not the same when it comes to maintaining torque values. Therefore, if a vehicle comes into your shop, and has huck bolts for attaching frame items, be cautious. There is a reason for huck bolts. It is to apply the correct torque and hold that torque during operation of the vehicle. Simply replacing the huck bolt with a grade 8

type bolt may not be sufficient. Also, please do not reuse old fasteners in anything you repair on a chassis.

There were a few sessions on the problems of recruiting and building new leadership within your business. One interesting point was how most senior leadership think they can relate to a younger person, which probably is not true. Due to that, the recruiting process is not positive. Don't look for someone who thinks like you. The industry will be made up mostly of generation X and millennials soon, followed by generation Z. Job descriptions and base policies of locations may need to be altered to accommodate a different view on the workplace.

the many opportunities to recruit through the military was also discussed. The government has programs, such as Skillbridge, that will pay ex-military persons a salary for a certain period of time (example: 6 months), while they are being developed and trained. Also, some funding for federal grant money from the government for apprenticeships are available.

An interesting session on wheel end thermo events was by far the session with the largest attendance. It's worth noting how brake system faults and wheel bearing adjustments can cause serious fire damage. This was interesting as the SSA regional training sessions for the first quarter sessions had a session on the wheel bearing adjustment procedure.

Those in attendance at TMC were asked if they had ever been involved with a thermo event. There were many hands raised. Simply not adjusting the brakes correctly giving an inadequate running clearance can generate enough heat to start a fire.

I did sit in on a session on future truck designs, which mentioned often the use of lithium batteries. These and 48-volt systems will change the way we service trucks. Plus, Dana/Spicer has introduced their electrified driveshaft which controls parking brakes on vehicles that do not have air brakes. It is fully interchangeable with current drivelines and suspensions.

A panel discussion was also held on best practices for shop operations and customer satisfaction, to reduce or advise of downtime. They mentioned open and honest communications between both the customer and the shop, as one of the most important, and with training the easiest to implement. Open dialogue develops strong relationships between shop and customer, and communicating is not just a one-way street. For example, customers always need the vehicle back as soon as possible, sometimes bugging service departments almost hourly as to when the vehicle will be complete. Then once completed, the customer does not pick it up for two days. That is not open and honest communication from the customer, nor would a service department continuously be replying to the customer that the vehicle is almost done, which could go on for hours, if not days, even before the vehicle is actually brought into the shop.

Another suggestion was a system called "express diagnosis" which is essentially checking out the vehicle within a set period of time. Each shop would have to determine that time, but should be approximately one hour or less. That does not mean the vehicle repair is done in an hour, or that the vehicle will be in the shop being worked on within an hour. This simply means the problem is reviewed, and the customer is informed of the time to repair and to be completed. Many customers have complained over time that their vehicle sits in the shop's parking lot for

hours if not days, then they are informed that it was a simple something that only took a short time to fix. By taking a quick look at the vehicle, a timeline can typically be determined, albeit probably not to the customer's desired timeline. At least this type of communicating does provide the customer with information, like it or not, which is open and honest communications.