



# How Intermodal Mechanic Training and Qualification Can Enhance Safety

Proper mechanic training in the intermodal industry isn't just essential to keep equipment in good order, but it can also help increase safety, reduce hazards and cut back on accidents within the intermodal goods transport industry.

Experts surveyed by *Intermodal Insights* shared their beliefs regarding the benefits of having a well-trained and properly equipped mechanic.

"Having a well-trained staff with the proper tools saves money for the IEPs in several ways," Ed Smith, a senior manager with motor vehicle parts and accessories manufacturer Webb Wheel Products, said. "Well-trained technicians can diagnose the problems without using the 'let us try this' approach, 'oh that did not work let us try this.' Faster repair with quality workmanship keeps the chassis in good working order, making more units available; this also lessens the out of service violations and fines."

"Well-trained technicians also do the repairs right the first time, keeping the IEP's customers moving with a unit they can count on," he added.

Similarly, Ron Joseph, an executive vice president and COO with chassis rental and leasing company DCLI, said that a properly trained and qualified mechanic will be more efficient at repair tasks, have the technical expertise to diagnose equipment repair needs, and perform repairs at a higher level of quality.

"Ultimately [it's] putting a more reliable piece of equipment into intermodal operations," he remarked. "This equates to improved driver productivity, both on terminal and on the roadway."

Elite Chassis Manager Tony Noles, who is involved in managing intermodal chassis mechanics for Dorsey Tire, added that experience, productivity, safety and customer satisfaction are all among the benefits of proper mechanic training.

"When you have a well-trained and properly equipped mechanic and truck, you promote a safer work environment," TRAC

Intermodal Executive Vice President & Chief Operations Officer Val Noel added. "I think the quality of repair is much better, which then improves the equipment reliability for the end user out on the street."

## Safety Issues

Regarding the question of whether there are any pervasive intermodal mechanic safety issues that need to be addressed, Noles named a few, including: two-piece rims for bias ply tires; identifying accurately loaded container weights or empty containers; and over-capacity warehouses and motor carrier yards.

Joseph said that another prevalent issue that the intermodal industry faces is a shortage of chassis mechanics.

"The market for skilled resources is very competitive and chassis mechanic candidates are many times drawn to other work environments. This creates a significant amount of employee turnover in this industry segment," he remarked. "This generates a necessary and large opportunity for constant mechanic training. A mechanic that is armed with essential repair proficiency, and has access to the right tools, equipment and information will take greater pride in the job they perform."

"This has the potential to improve mechanic retention rates," he added.

"I don't think our industry lacks proper mechanic training or proper safety training," Noel said. "I think what our industry lacks is having enough quality resources to hire into our industry. Like the trucking industry, the mechanical side is suffering from a shortage of qualified mechanics, and collectively, our industry needs to come together like we are on the driver situation and figure out how we can make a mechanical job more attractive to a quality mechanic so that we can get our equipment repaired and back in service in a safe, reliable manner."

Smith also said he feels that there aren't any truly pervasive mechanic safety issues in the intermodal industry.

"No, the mechanics follows the securement safety rules very well before working on any chassis," he said. "This safety culture is driven home by the M&R companies, IEPs, ports, railroads and the unions, and strictly enforced. This is one area that is well covered."

## Additional Training

Smith did acknowledge, however, that additional mechanic safety training is something that's needed in the industry.

"M&R vendors and unions are providing some refresher type training for their current employees, but extensive training is needed for new technicians just starting out," he explained. "The current on-the-job training is lacking in instruction as the techs get drawn into the day-to-day operations without supervision."

"The intermodal industry, like many others, is struggling to recruit new employees, and lack of experience can lead to accidents," he added.

Joseph added that he believes "continuous" training is needed, given the mechanic resource constraints in the industry.

"In addition, as we see evolving technology come into play, there will definitely be a need for additional and different types of mechanic training," he remarked. "Telematics and proactive gate technology will provide various forms of component and event tracking, and once this technology is prevalent in the industry, it will be important to consider how this tracking will be communicated and made visible to mechanic resources so that they can effectively react to these types of events."

In addition to training, Joseph said that other areas need to be considered to enhance safety, including equipment specifications and terminal repair processes.

"Equipment specifications including bias tire to radial conversions, multi-piece to single piece rim conversions and LED light conversions will positively affect fleet reliability," he explained, adding that intermodal terminal repair processes have the opportunity to change overall repair procedures by segregating units for inspection and repair, giving inspectors and mechanics an opportunity to increase equipment touch points, and create a safer environment for mechanics.

## Worker Retention

Noel brought up the point that properly training mechanics is important, but retaining quality, well-trained mechanics also is vital.

"I think from a retention standpoint, our industry has to figure out how to make the job a little bit more appealing," he said. "Collectively, our industry needs to figure out how we make outside jobs in inclement conditions valuable enough that people want to get that job and then people want to stay in that job."

"You want to have it as a career, as a career option for these folks," TRAC Intermodal spokesman Jim Segata said of intermodal mechanic work. "So that they know there's a future in it and that they're going to have a safe environment where they're working."

An additional resource for mechanic training and safety is *The IANA Guide to Chassis Inspection and Repair*. Developed by industry subject matter experts, it is a comprehensive 300-page manual of 53 Intermodal Recommended Practices covering nine critical areas of an intermodal chassis. Information on this resource can be found at [www.intermodal.org/resource-center/chassis-guide](http://www.intermodal.org/resource-center/chassis-guide).