



Image courtesy of IMC Companies

# Recommended Practices for Chassis Mechanics to Provide Many Benefits

The wide-ranging benefits from the work produced by IANA's Intermodal Chassis Mechanics Training Task Force will be arriving soon, with the publication of a comprehensive blueprint to assist chassis mechanics with equipment inspections and repairs. The intermodal recommended practices work of the task force was approved by IANA's Maintenance & Repair Committee at its meeting in May.

The resource guide of more than 300 pages will be available in both printed and electronic formats, including detailed graphics, reference tables and additional material.

Marty Summers, general manager of maintenance administration at Consolidated Chassis Management, who chaired the task force, explained how the 53 intermodal recommended practices' benefits will be spread across the intermodal community.

"It's important to note that all segments of the industry were [involved] in the task force – every [intermodal equipment provider] as well as manufacturers and maintenance companies," said Summers. "By having every stakeholder represented, there is important buy-in to the process.

"If you don't embrace it, you leave the door open to have equipment remain how it is today," he added. "There is still room for improvement. To make sure the same repair isn't done several times a year, you need to make sure the repair is done right the first time. That is a major benefit of the IRPs."

Gary Cornelius, vice president of business development for motor carrier TCW, summed up the benefits this way.

"Too often, the repair solution [for] intermodal is more cost-based than thought of [as] a long-term repair opportunity," he said. Cornelius believes the IRPs will result in both a safer environment

and a more dependable service product for the customer as mechanical issues with the equipment are reduced.

## Wide Range of Benefits

Other executives elaborated on repair quality and additional benefits.

- The quality of repairs will be improved as mechanics use the IRPs and become more proficient and professional for all types of equipment. That should increase safety, which will lead to more reliable service for motor carriers in the form of fewer roadside breakdowns and improved customer satisfaction.
- Incidence of roadside violations and the consequences in the form of poorer Compliance Safety Accountability scores that affect insurance and liability expenses should be reduced.
- Expenses ultimately should also be reduced as there should be fewer incidents of expensive rework to be completed on substandard initial repairs.
- Deployment of the IRPs across the industry will aid in company recruitment and retention efforts of chassis mechanics as well as increase the professionalism and visibility of this career.

- The IRPs and related competency documents can serve as the basis for curriculum for maintenance and repair jobs at junior colleges, trade schools and other companies that offer training.

“IANA’s leadership toward establishing a singular, industry-adapted, approved inspector curriculum for IEP safety compliance inspections has been outstanding,” said Jack Van Steenburg, Chief Safety Officer and Assistant Administrator at the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. “The ultimate goal is to further strengthen safety for dock and yard workers, drayage and long-haul drivers — and for all travelers sharing the nation’s highways and roads.”

## IEP Buy-in Is Vital

“The success of the program will depend heavily on the intermodal equipment providers,” Summers said. “If an IEP is willing to accept substandard repairs, we are going to have a substandard program. If IEPs require superb repairs, we will have a superb program.”

“Until now, one of the things that has been lacking in intermodal is a consistent training program for mechanics that addresses all of the specific tasks associated with the industry’s equipment,” said Paul Tamburelli, principal at the Transportation Compliance and Safety Group. “Very few maintenance companies had the resources — time and money — to do systematic training.” The release of the IRPs will be instrumental to the development of industry training and testing programs and will serve as guidelines for these programs.



Tamburelli

The IRPs are divided into nine sections, or categories. They are: general procedures/auxiliary equipment; electrical and lamps; tires, wheels, lugs; axles; couplers and hitches; chassis frames; suspensions; brakes; welding/fabrication.

“These categories can be used as measuring tools in training mechanics in a structured procedure that will enable the repair company to evaluate the competency of individual mechanics,” said Tom Slattery, FlexiVan’s director of maintenance and repair operations.

He also noted the benefit for mechanics who may be proficient in some repairs, but not others. “All mechanics should be capable of changing tires and repairing lights but not all mechanics would be capable of performing wheel end work or resolve [anti-lock braking system] malfunctions,” he said.

## Implementation Process

Several executives outlined the implementation process at their companies, highlighting the variety of benefits.

Joey Frederick, vice president of P & B Intermodal, emphasized the value of consistency that will result from adopting the IRPs, including the ability to standardize its training across all 50 P&B locations. He also stressed the benefits of being able to tailor training to a journeyman mechanic’s particular needs, such as a worker who is more skilled in tire maintenance than brakes.

Another benefit he noted was related to the future. “This will be a good resource for folks who are doing something else now, and haven’t even heard of chassis,” Frederick said.

“DCLI’s practices are in line with the IRPs,” said Jason Slegers, vice president of maintenance and repair/procurement for Direct ChassisLink. Having standardized practices within the industry will help and in some cases streamline processes across multiple repair locations and vendors.

Cornelius said that many companies like TCW, which already have time-tested inspection and repair practices, can find additional opportunities to improve by following the thorough processes contained in the IRPs.

## Complementing Existing Programs

Another factor is how the IRPs match up with both existing company programs and programs that have been developed by other trade associations.

Slegers believes the IRPs will mesh well with maintenance practices established by American Trucking Associations’ Technology & Maintenance Council.

Summers said the IRPs are “down-to-earth,” general practices that are tailored to address every possible repair on every type of chassis.

“FlexiVan will use these IRPs as the standard of all repairs and will issue copies to all of our mechanics as well as target specific areas as topics of discussion with our mechanics during our monthly meetings,” said Slattery. “FlexiVan inspectors and managers will be using these IRPs as the guideline, as to the quality of repairs that we will expect from our third-party repair vendors.”

Slattery also said he didn’t anticipate major changes in maintenance procedures because FlexiVan’s repair standards already are thorough and proactive.

## Enforcement Angle

Tamburelli, whose background includes enforcement, identified enforcement-related benefits.

“Chassis have been easy pickings” when inspectors are working at the roadside, Tamburelli said. Improved maintenance should reduce out-of-service incidents, which have been declining in recent years but still are a regular occurrence.

He also noted another step that will be needed. “We’ll need to educate enforcement,” he said. “Inspectors are dubious of new programs because they hear about them often. The proof is in the pudding. If there is a Level 1 inspection that finds no defects, they will focus their attention elsewhere. Inspectors will know chassis have been maintained to a higher standard and will pay more attention to other vehicles.

“The trucking industry will enjoy the benefit of not having a hot load sit out of service at the roadside,” he explained, waiting as much as eight hours before a repair is made. “Providing a good piece of equipment that lowers their costs will keep the customers happy.”

Tamburelli also envisioned IRP-related benefits for intermodal that mirror the recent past. For example, he noted the substantial dropoff in the cost of replacing lights after a switch to LED lights, and the reduced cost of tires after airing systems were put in place.