

Putting safety first for the big long-haulers

Scania SA's initiative of setting up of a series of roadside safety checks on trucks, buses and their drivers during the festive season, proved an unqualified success, according to the company's promotions and communications manager, Gideon de Swardt. He participated personally in all nine checkpoints staged between December 14 and 23.

This was a joint venture between the Department of Transport's Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC), Scania, Pick n Pay and a health and safety company, Reality.

The RTMC provided 10 traffic officers who spent a week undergoing specialised training at the Gerotek test facility, near Pretoria, prior to the start of the programme. Their training included actually driving trucks, which was a new experience for many of them. Several members of RTMC also participated in the project at the various check points.

De Swardt said the incidence of unroadworthy vehicles was not as high as some had expected, but he said it was concerning that there were more problems with the buses than the trucks. "For instance, one bus packed with learners and teachers had no operative brakes and was immediately pulled off the road," he said.

Although some of the vehicles were issued with discontinuation of service notices, the major method of policing the vehicles was by the issuing of special "friendly tickets", which were in the form of a letter to the operator of the specific truck or bus where a problem was found - such as worn tyres - with the recommendation that corrective action be taken as soon as possible.

The checkpoints were set up at Grasmere, Heidelberg, Middelburg, Bela Bela and Monsol. Where multiple checkpoints were established they were in different directions and often at different venues, which were usually fuel stations or weighbridges. The checks were not limited to Scania products, but involved all makes and models.

A trained truck technician was on hand to perform minor repairs. One of the operations he performed was removing a damaged mudguard from the trailer of a fully laden fuel tanker after it was seen that the mudguard was cutting into a tyre.

The opportunity was also taken to test the drivers for hypertension (high blood pressure), HIV/AIDS and sugar diabetes. Medical staff were on hand to provide counselling, which was welcomed by the drivers.

This was the second of these road safety initiatives undertaken by Scania in 2011, with the first having taken place in Namibia.

"The response has been very positive, both from those involved in the project on the ground as well as the truck owners and operators," said De Swardt. "We are particularly pleased that it went a long way to improving the relationship between truck

drivers and law enforcement authorities. We will support further ventures of this sort in the future."

Source: Business Day

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