

Arming the transportation industry with safety solutions

Low Clearance Ahead

Throughout the United States, and especially in older cities and on older highways, there are low bridges and a variety of elevated railways. These low clearances are a serious safety hazard for large trucks and buses, and can result in injury, loss of life, damage to infrastructure, interruption of commerce, and delays in travel times.

The FMCSA believes bridge strikes are avoidable through better awareness of route restrictions along travel paths, gained by paying closer attention to road signs and by the appropriate use of electronic navigation systems intended for trucks and buses.

DANGER: LOW CLEARANCE

The number of times a bridge or overpass structure has been struck usually dictates the types of warning devices used on and around the structure. However, the warning signs are not the only indicator that a structure may have low clearance. You can easily tell if a bridge has been struck before, by simply looking at the edge of the bridge before going under it or noticing heavy skid marks on the pavement leading up to the structure.

Even with these warning signs, drivers still strike low clearance structures. Below are a few of the reasons these incidents occur:

- Lack of “on-the-road” experience and/or training.
- Driver inattention to the extra warning devices and/or signs.
- Misjudgment or misinformation regarding the height of the trailer.
- Driver is used to driving a smaller or different type vehicle.



All drivers should be warned about low clearance collisions through thorough training, to include a road test that emphasizes low clearances and tests the driver’s evaluation techniques as they approach the structure, and their clearance evaluation as they drive under the bridge.

KNOW YOUR TRAILER

From a safety standpoint, a driver should know the height of his or her trailer or load. Some carriers have designed overhead measuring devices so the driver can determine the trailer height upon departing the terminal. Other carriers have marked the trailer height on the left front

corner of the trailer so the information is visible when the driver looks in the mirror. Several carriers place stickers with the measurements inside the cab.

Regardless of where the information is located, the driver should know the trailer height, or have access to it prior to departing on any trip.

While drivers must watch for overhead clearance signs posted at bridges and overpasses, they should be trained not to solely rely on posted heights alone. A loaded trailer may fit under a bridge, but when lightly loaded, or empty, it might not. A trailer can also “bounce” on an uneven road surface, or it may be higher due to the setting of the fifth wheel. Repaved roads or packed snow and ice can also reduce the clearance below the height that is posted.

STAY UP-TO-DATE

If you have a GPS unit, keep the updates updated. But don’t rely on the unit exclusively unless you want to run the risk of getting wedged under a bridge. You need to have another reliable source that you can consult. Consider a good map book. An up-to-date, large scale, spiral bound, laminated road carrier’s atlas is a great option. Update the atlas at least every other year to get the most recent updates in road construction, road restriction and other highway data.

HAVE A PLAN

If you are going into an area known for its low clearances, you’ll want to:

- make sure you have extremely accurate directions before going to your customer. If need be, call your customer and speak with somebody who knows how to get commercial motor vehicles routed in.
- include an escape route in your plan, just in case you “can’t fit.”
- remember, that low clearance problems can also happen around buildings, docks and any construction locations.

Unless there are extenuating circumstances, low clearance collisions are almost always considered preventable and heavy fines can and will be imposed for failing to comply with posted road signs.



June 2020
The Shield
Low Clearance Ahead
Quiz



Driver Name: _____ Date: _____
Please Print

Driver Signature: _____

Please circle one correct answer for each question.

1. The FMCSA believes bridge strikes are avoidable through _____.
 - a. better awareness of route restrictions
 - b. paying closer attention to road signs
 - c. appropriate use of electronic navigation systems
 - d. all of the above
2. Which is *not* necessarily an indicator of a bridge being previously struck?
 - a. Warning signs or devices
 - b. Deteriorating conditions
 - c. Skid marks on pavement
 - d. none of the above
3. The height of the trailer can be posted anywhere on or around the truck or trailer.
 - a. True
 - b. False
4. Update your atlas at least _____ to get the most recent updates in road construction, road restriction and other highway data.
 - a. once per year
 - b. every other year
 - c. twice per year
 - d. none of the above
5. A driver should include _____ in his or her trip plan just in case he/she "can't fit".
 - a. a meal
 - b. an escape route
 - c. a memo
 - d. all of the above

