

MONTHLY SAFETY MEETING

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Is Your Cab Accessory Mounting Compliant?

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In-cab technology is here. The modern towman cannot run a profitable business without embracing technology such as digital dispatch, route optimization and cellular communications. The days of a simple low-band two-way radio, carbonless invoice pad and a pen are long gone. Even the vehicle manufacturers have embraced in-cab tech, making huge data screens and touchpad controls standard on most models of trucks. While this is cool, it leaves little to no dashboard space for towers to mount their supplemental electronics. The modern tow truck looks something like the bridge deck of the Starship Enterprise.

So, where do we mount these tablets and cellphones?

Windshield mounts are very common, especially for cellphones and GPS devices, but are they legal? In many cases NO they are not, unless installed in a very small area of the windshield.

I have noted a marked increase in citations issued to commercial drivers regarding windshield-mounted devices. Please take caution in reviewing where your devices are mounted and what the rules are in your state.

Every state, as well as both the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, have specific rules regarding what technology can be mounted on a windshield, how it can be mounted and, most importantly, where it can be mounted. Surprisingly, 21 states flat out prohibit suction cup windshield mounts in motor vehicles, although these laws are rarely enforced except for commercial vehicles.

Most towers are considered commercial motor vehicles under Federal regulation and must comply with the Federal regulations pertaining to windshield-mounted devices. These rules can be found in 49 CFR Part 393.60(e) which basically prohibit mounting most devices and stickers within the area swept by the windshield wipers, the driver's line of sight or anywhere more than 6" below the top of the windshield.

There are a few exceptions to these requirements for vehicle safety technologies such as lane-departure

warning sensors, dash cameras and other technology designed to make driving safer. GPS devices and cellphones are not included in this exception. Neither are dispatch systems or data terminals.

How do you get around this, given that there is nowhere else to mount these devices?

There are several alternatives to windshield suction cup mounts, many of which are excellent choices. A hard mount is always better. Hard mounts will provide better securement of these devices, reduce vibration and eliminate the chance of damage from a suction cup failing and dropping your device on the floor.

My personal favorite is mounting these devices just below the dashboard line with a floor mount stand or flexible gooseneck type mount. This allows for multiple drivers to change the viewing angle as needed, keeps the display from interfering with a clear view of the roadway and keeps glare to a minimum, which is especially important at night.

Another alternative is using top of dashboard mounting locations, provided that the device does not interfere with your view. If the device is mounted to the dashboard or roof/overhead console it is not subject to 393.60, and legal as long as it does not obstruct your view.

If you feel you must use suction-type mounts, providing they are legal in your state, then they must be mounted in the top 6" of the windshield. I strongly recommend using some type of secondary attachment to catch your device in case the suction cup lets go. A small piece of string, wire tie or even small bungee cord between the device and the sun visor usually will work as a safety catch.

With electronic logging devices, keep in mind that the regulations require the devices to be mounted in the cab and within the driver's reach while seated and wearing a seat belt. ELDs are not exempted vehicle safety technology and cannot be windshield mounted, unless in compliance with the rules for all other windshield mounted technology. Many drivers have been cited for not having a mounted ELD when using their cellphone or tablet as an ELD.

Bottom line, if at all possible, you should keep your windshield clean and clear of obstructions for the safest possible driving environment. In-cab technology makes our job easier; however, we cannot allow it to distract us from the task at hand: safely operating a motor vehicle.
Stay safe!

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