

Thinking About Skipping the Station? Think Again.

By: Evan Lockridge

With hours of services (HOS) regulations in full effect following the electronic logging device (ELD) mandate, almost every working truck driver would prefer to have more time to get where they are going. Delays can happen at shippers' locations, along with traffic jams, severe weather, crashes, and more —all while drivers work to adhere to HOS rules. Drivers face a number of obstacles every single day when picking up shipments or delivering them on time.

If you've a driver and you've ever been tempted to try to sneak past a weigh station to save some time, or if you've told a driver in your fleet to do so, you will want to think twice. That's because doing so can cost you more than just being fined — it can seriously affect safety records.

According to both Captain Chris Turner with the Kansas Highway Patrol and Corporal L.T. Catoe with the South Carolina State Transport Police, it's hard to measure the extent truckers try to sneak past open weigh stations. Even though it's clearly a risk, why do drivers do it?

"There are a variety of reasons," said Corporal Catoe. "Some will say they didn't know the weigh station was open ... or they are out of hours and they figure they would rather take a chance on trying to get by as opposed to going in and getting their log book checked. It's really just driver dependent. There's no set reason per se as to why someone would intentionally bypass the scales."

In some cases, drivers will skip weigh stations because they know they will be in trouble if they pull in, said Captain Turner.

"My belief would be that sometimes people run the scale because they are aware of a violation...but that's never the reason they have provided for not stopping," he said.

In other instances, Turner says drivers won't have any valid reason, given where they were headed with their load. "In other words, it didn't save them time, didn't save them money and didn't save them fuel," he said.

While there are a world of reasons drivers give for trying to sneak past open weigh stations and inspection

facilities, the fact that fines are not considered severe in many states may be another reason.

For example, in South Carolina, the fine — including court costs — for trying to sneak past a weigh station is about \$232, according to Lt. Catoe. Not small, but not a terribly large amount either. According to Turner, the fine is only a little bit less in Kansas, “somewhere near a couple hundred dollars,” including court costs. Turner said the Kansas amount was similar to fines for the same violation in many other states.

If you skip past a weigh station and are caught, it could lead to authorities discovering wider problems with a truck or the driver.



If this has you thinking that a fine of only around a couple of hundreds of dollars is a small price to pay if you or one of your drivers are caught trying to skip past a weigh station, here's some food for thought. If you do this and are caught, it could lead to authorities discovering wider problems with a truck or the driver. Plus, these additional discoveries have negative effects on driving records and safety scores.

For example, if a trucker drives past an open weigh station when he was supposed to have stopped in, law enforcement may pursue and pull him over. In some instances, the officer could require the trucker to drive back to the weigh station, which takes extra time. Once there, the officer may go so far as to conduct a full Level 1 inspection, which not only takes even more time, it

could lead to more fines for violations on top of one he may likely receive for trying to sneak past a weigh station. It all adds up significant time and money wasted — and that's not where it ends.

According to Corporal Catoe, in South Carolina, for instance, whether the driver gets a citation or not, he or she will receive an inspection report. If a violation is reported, it will go against the carrier in the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's Compliance, Safety and Accountability (CSA) program, which is used to determine which carriers pose the greatest safety risks. Additionally, drivers can also have points added to their state-issued Commercial Driver's Licenses, no matter where they reside.

Such violations can also affect carriers and drivers under the FMCSA's Safety Measure System (SMS), which is a component of CSA used to measure the relative safety fitness of commercial motor carriers, according to Captain Turner.

SMS is also a factor used to determine scores in the Inspection Selection System score, a key indicator in determining which trucks will be pulled in by enforcement for inspections. Weigh station bypass decisions, such as whether to grant bypasses to PrePass users, are frequently based on ISS scores and other credential information.

In other words, illegally avoiding a weigh station could jeopardize a trucking fleet's scores in a variety of ways, including having a higher number of their trucks ordered to pull in rather than being green-lit to bypass. That's because the more clean inspections you have, your safety records will improve over time. And great safety scores can mean more green bypass lights.

Or as Captain Turner put it, “I don't think truckers trying to sneak past weigh stations is necessarily a global systemic issue. However, when you [illegally] bypass a scale, not only are you obviously risking the consequences, but you're also foregoing the benefits as well.”

The bottom line: when you forgo the ability to have a clean inspection and you're someone who goes through a scale regularly, you also forgo the opportunity for positive interaction with law enforcement officers — along with willful compliance with the law that is a benefit to everyone. 🚚