



# ROADSIDEREADER

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
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## 4 SPRING ROAD CHECK

Winter usually does not break a truck all at once.

It wears things down a little at a time - in the tread, in the wiring, in the brake system, in the trailer connections, in the wiper blades that looked fine until the first hard spring rain. By April, the question is no longer whether winter took a toll. It is how much.

That is what makes spring inspection season matter. That makes April more than a maintenance month.

It is inspection month.

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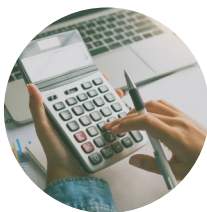
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# Spring Road Check

## What Drivers and Fleets Should Inspect Now

Winter usually does not break a truck all at once.

It wears things down a little at a time – in the tread, in the wiring, in the brake system, in the trailer connections, in the wiper blades that looked fine until the first hard spring rain. By April, the question is no longer whether winter took a toll. It is how much.

That is what makes spring inspection season matter.

For fleets and owner-operators, April is the month to stop thinking about getting through winter and start dealing with what winter left behind. Salt, potholes, freeze-thaw swings, rough yards, and long cold-weather miles all have a way of turning minor wear into real problems.

This year, that spring reset comes with a deadline: the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance's 2026 International Roadcheck is set for May 12-14, with a vehicle focus on cargo securement and a driver focus on electronic logging device tampering and falsification. CVSA's 2026 out-of-service criteria also took effect April 1. ([cvsa.org](http://cvsa.org))

That makes April more than a maintenance month.

It is inspection month.

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## Start with tires

Cold weather pulls down tire pressure. Potholes pound wheels, sidewalls, and alignment. A truck can come out of winter still rolling fine but already showing the early signs of a bigger problem: uneven wear, weather cracking, sidewall damage, or a trailer tire that has taken too many hard hits backing around tight lots.

And tire trouble rarely stays contained. A worn shoulder can point to alignment drift. Irregular wear can point to suspension issues. A low tire can become a heat problem fast once temperatures rise and miles stack up. FMCSA continues to list tire defects among common violations, which is one reason spring is the time to look past tread depth alone and inspect the whole wheel-end picture. ([csa.fmcsa.dot.gov](http://csa.fmcsa.dot.gov))

## Brakes get expensive fast

Brake problems have a way of building quietly through the winter. Moisture, corrosion, contamination, air leaks, worn linings, weak components, and out-of-adjustment parts do not always announce themselves dramatically. Sometimes it is just a softer response than usual. A little extra stopping distance. A problem a driver gets used to because the truck is still getting down the road.

That is the danger.

By spring, brake trouble is not just a shop issue. It is an out-of-service risk. Federal guidance notes that a vehicle can be placed out of service when defective brakes reach key thresholds. That is why spring inspection needs to go well beyond a quick glance. Air systems, hoses, chambers, slack adjusters, drums, rotors, trailer brake connections, and



warning devices all deserve a hard look before an inspector is the one finding the problem. ([csa.fmcsa.dot.gov](http://csa.fmcsa.dot.gov))

## Lights are easy to ignore

A lamp that cuts out. A turn signal with a wiring issue. A dirty or cracked lens. Corrosion in a connection that only shows up when the truck hits rough pavement. These are the kinds of defects drivers can live with for too long because they feel small – until they are not. Lighting problems are part of the required pre-trip inspection for a reason. They are easy for enforcement to spot, easy for plaintiffs' lawyers to talk about after a crash, and easy for an inspector to read as a sign that daily maintenance has gotten sloppy. CVSA inspection procedures include checks of required lamps for operation, mounting, color, and visibility. ([csa.fmcsa.dot.gov](http://csa.fmcsa.dot.gov))



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## **Exposing lazy visibility checks**

Wipers often get treated like winter equipment. They are not. Spring may be when they matter most.

After months of ice, scraping, salt film, and road grime, wiper blades that looked passable in February can start smearing badly in April. Add heavy rain, fog, road spray, pollen, and muddy shoulders, and visibility becomes a safety issue in a hurry. Federal pre-trip guidance includes windshield wipers for a reason, and CVSA inspection procedures call for checking their operation. This is also the time to make sure washers are working, mirrors are clean and secure, and glass condition is not being ignored. ([csa.fmcsa.dot.gov](http://csa.fmcsa.dot.gov))

## **Fluids and leaks tell the truth**

A truck may have survived winter. That does not mean it came through winter clean.

Spring inspection is when seepage, slow leaks, and neglected fluid issues tend to show themselves. Coolant, engine oil, washer fluid, hub condition, power steering, and brake system issues all deserve attention. So do the leaks that drivers start treating as background noise: a little grease here, a little oil there, a drip that has been around long enough to stop feeling urgent. FMCSA lists leaking oil or grease from hubs among recurring violations, and failing to correct known defects can become a violation of its own. ([csa.fmcsa.dot.gov](http://csa.fmcsa.dot.gov))

The point of a spring inspection is not topping things off and hoping for the best. It is finding

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the source, fixing it, and keeping a known problem from becoming a breakdown or roadside citation.

## Inspect the trailer like it matters

Because it does.

Too many spring maintenance conversations still center on the power unit, as if the trailer is just along for the ride. Inspectors do not see it that way, and neither should fleets. Trailer tires, brakes, lights, brake connections, doors, landing gear, kingpin area, structural condition, and coupling components all belong on the spring checklist. FMCSA's sample driver vehicle inspection report includes each of those items for a reason. ([csa.fmcsa.dot.gov](http://csa.fmcsa.dot.gov))

That is especially true this year because CVSA says cargo securement will be the vehicle emphasis area during the 2026 Roadcheck. Tie-downs, anchor points, securement devices, and trailer condition all matter. A truck that feels road-ready can still lose the day if the trailer or load is not right. ([cvsa.org](http://cvsa.org))

## A clean truck is not enough

Spring readiness is mechanical, but it is also procedural.

Federal rules require drivers to be satisfied a commercial motor vehicle is in safe operating condition before driving it. At minimum, FMCSA says that includes checking core systems such as brakes, tires, lights, wipers, steering, wheels and rims, mirrors, coupling devices, and emergency equipment. Commercial vehicles also must undergo periodic inspection at least once every 12 months, and fleets are expected to document maintenance and repairs



appropriately. ([csa.fmcsa.dot.gov](http://csa.fmcsa.dot.gov)) ([fmcsa.dot.gov](http://fmcsa.dot.gov))

In practical terms, April is the month to clean up annual inspection status, tighten DVIR habits, verify defects were actually repaired, and make sure nobody is depending on memory when documentation counts.

## What a good April check really does

The best spring road check is not flashy. It is disciplined.

It catches the tire that is wearing before it comes apart on a hot run. It catches the air leak before it becomes an out-of-service brake violation. It catches the weak lamp, the smeared wiper, the loose connection, the seeping hub, the worn securement gear, and the paperwork gap before they cost a driver time, a fleet money, or both.

The logo for 'Hotels 4 Truckers' features the word 'Hotels' in white, followed by a shield-shaped icon containing a white number '4' on a red background, and the word 'Truckers' in white. A small registered trademark symbol (®) is located to the right of 'Truckers'. Above the 'Hotels' text is a small white icon of a house with a red roof.

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A few snapshots from April 4, when Mona Brimeyer met owner-operator and NAIT Advisory Board Member Stu Kinney. Stu rolled in with six helpers unloading the trailer, plenty of good stories, and a lot of solid information to share. By the end of it all, Mona was having so much fun she joked, "I think I will quit my insurance job and become a truck driver!"



Say hello to Gizmo – the in-cab travel buddy riding shotgun (among other places) with James Evans. If you spot them out on the road, be sure to say hi ... and Gizmo probably would not turn down a good head scratch.

Share your pet's pics with NAIT, and we'll pawsitively feature them in a future newsletter. Drop a line to NAIT Specialist Mona Brimeyer at [mona.brimeyer@naitusa.com](mailto:mona.brimeyer@naitusa.com)



## Staying Sharp in Work Zones

Spring does not just bring warmer weather. It brings orange barrels, narrowed lanes, rough pavement edges, sudden slowdowns, and the kind of split-second decisions that can turn a routine run sideways.

For truck drivers, work-zone season is not an inconvenience. It is a stress test.

National Work Zone Awareness Week runs April 20-24 this year, and spring always throws fresh light on a reality drivers already know: work zones squeeze space, shorten reaction time, and raise the stakes on every merge, brake tap, and lane shift. FHWA says the annual campaign is designed to focus national attention on safety in work zones, while FMCSA warns that trucks face additional challenges there due to long stopping distances, large blind spots, narrow lanes, and shifting traffic patterns. ([ops.fhwa.dot.gov](http://ops.fhwa.dot.gov)) ([fmcsa.dot.gov](http://fmcsa.dot.gov))

That is why April is a good time for a reset.

Not a hollow reminder to “be careful.” A real reset. Slow down sooner. Leave more room. Read the zone earlier. Expect somebody else to do something reckless and drive like you already know it is coming.

Because in work zones, that is usually the difference between a professional day and a bad one.

## Fuel, Freight, and Margins What truckers are watching

A lot of truckers are asking the same question in different ways: Is this market finally getting better, or is it just getting more expensive to stay in it?

That is the tension riding shotgun in April 2026. Freight is showing signs of life. Rates are firmer than they were a year ago. Capacity is tighter. But fuel is up hard, margins are still thin, and for small carriers and owner-operators, a better market on paper does not always feel better by Friday afternoon.

So the spring trucking economy is not really about one number. It is about the squeeze between three of them: what the load pays, what the fuel costs, and what is left when the week is over.

### Freight is firmer, but not easy

There are signs that the bottom of the freight cycle is behind the industry. Cass reported truckload rates were up 1.8% from a year ago, and ACT Research says 2026 is a transition year – tightening capacity, uneven demand, and gradually improving pricing.

That is the business view.

The trucker's view is simpler: There are more decent loads than there were, but not enough bad decisions can be hidden inside the week anymore.

### Fuel is eating the celebration

If there is one number making small operators flinch this spring, it is diesel. The EIA said in its April outlook that U.S. retail diesel prices are expected to peak above \$5.80 a gallon in April and average



\$4.80 for 2026, with prices pushed higher by tighter global supplies and U.S. inventories running below the recent five-year average. At the start of last week, diesel was still up 35% since the Middle East war began six weeks earlier.

### Small operators are adjusting

When fuel jumps, the one-truck or three-truck outfit talks about whether a load still works after deadhead, whether a backhaul is clean enough to save the week, whether a broker's number covers the lane, and whether it makes more sense to sit half a day than run cheap freight just to stay moving.

In plain English, some carriers are not winning because the market is easy. They are surviving because they have gotten choosier.



## Resetting Routines for Spring

Spring is a good time to reset a truck. It is also a good time to reset the driver.

By April, a lot of road habits have drifted a little. Winter meals got heavier. Water got replaced by coffee and convenience-store sugar. Sleep got squeezed. A stiff back started feeling normal. A tight hamstring became part of the job. None of that usually falls apart in one day. It just wears on a driver mile by mile, until feeling “fine” really means feeling worn down.

That is why spring wellness matters on the road. Not because drivers need a lecture. Because they need a reset that actually works in a cab, at a fuel island, at a shipper, and in the 20 minutes between one obligation and the next.

The good news is that the most useful fixes are usually the smallest ones.

- Eat like you plan to keep driving – pack healthier meals, snacks, and drinks when possible.
- Drink water before you feel behind – drink fluids even if you do not feel thirsty, because thirst can lag behind what the body already needs
- Sleep discipline beats toughing it out – the only real cure for fatigue is sleep.
- Do not normalize feeling stiff – set a goal of at least 30 minutes of activity five days a week.
- Small habits travel farther than big promises – carry a water bottle, pack two better snacks, walk a few laps at a stop instead of going straight back to the bunk.

## Word Search

### April Birthdays

- Alec Baldwin
- Bette Davis
- Billy Dee Williams
- Butch Cassidy
- Carol Burnett
- Charlie Chaplin
- Dale Earnhardt
- David Letterman
- Eddy Murphy
- Gregory Peck
- Jack Nicholson
- Jane Mansfield
- Leonardo Da Vinci
- Marlo Brando
- Marvin Gaye
- Merle Haggard
- Robert Downey Jr.
- Thomas Jefferson
- Ulysses S. Grant
- William Shakespeare

T K G G M D W J V C H O Z L F N J O V P M T Z Z S  
 U Y C M K X Z I A X G Z G A Q W B J X W G O X U R  
 K F X D G Q P B L C A R H D Y M L L O T C P K D R  
 L U U S A R Y P F L K L E X G A Q D X P R B E Z D  
 O E J C A L O O V J I N E G M N N S U V K H I I I  
 J M O Z N I E B M T A A I C O L U A Q R Z M M H A  
 G P A N B A U E E T N N M C B R T S B F P W I U H  
 C U W R A I K L A R Q T E S H A Y H R X B I F J B  
 W H N S L R L N Y R T X D M H O L P H N Z Q D Q G  
 K E A V G O D L M S N D O X A A L D E M O S Z I M  
 G D G R D Q B O Y R S H O B U N K S W C O T P L Z  
 I D X Q L S D R D D R E A W U Y S E O I K L V D F  
 D Y B U B I Y J A A E V S R N T C F S N N Y H B U  
 M M V R E Y E K U N V E O S D E C A I P C I J Y M  
 E U G R T S U C V Q D I W B G T Y H Y E E R C H A  
 R R S F T P E O H M R O N I Z R N J C O L A I A R  
 L P S Z E V N S Z A Y H T C L G A A R A F D R W V  
 E H Q C D Y X U E N P X I T I L B N R A S W A E I  
 H Y N M A H A I L S X L D A B B I U T N M S X M N  
 A X T M V L P I B O R G I V J L I A N F V I I Z G  
 G I J W I H F C C X Z U D N I K Q L M Y K J G D A  
 G H J X S T C A R O L B U R N E T T Q S X U Q U Y  
 A N F G Z Y S Z L X T Q Z F C C E X M N V O X W E  
 R T H O M A S J E F F E R S O N J P O E E J T V S  
 D Y U W C Z N D A V I D L E T T E R M A N G N V Q

	9		6			7		
								1
5	3	1	8	4			2	9
	5		1	6		2		7
	7		2					4
2		8		7	9	3		5
		7			4			
	6						4	3
						1	7	2

## Sudoku

The goal is to fill a 9x9 grid with digits 1 through 9, ensuring each digit appears only once in each row, column, and 3x3 subgrid.