

Abnormal loads check sheets (escort and encounter)

Using an app to gather detailed information when dealing with abnormal loads at the roadside, during both encounter and police escort.

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Key details

Does it work?	Promising
Focus	Prevention
Topic	Crime prevention Operational policing
Organisation	West Midlands Police
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Region	West Midlands
Partners	Police Education Government department Private sector
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	August 2022

Key details

Scale of initiative	National
Target group	Adults Offenders Workforce

Aim

To provide a tool that:

- ensures all officers in every force ask a consistent set of questions for all encounters or stops under the Road Traffic Act with an abnormal load operator (UK or non-UK)
- enables all officers to have a better understanding of what is required when carrying out an abnormal load check
- provides easily accessible legislation to officers
- increases the knowledge and confidence of officers to deal with heavy haulage
- ensures officers have a detailed record of all information that could be used for further investigation

Intended outcome

- Improve the current 98% non-compliance rate found in abnormal loads being transported in the UK.
- Work in partnership with and support the road and bridge authorities to improve road safety and protect structures when transporting abnormal loads.
- Ensure that operators receive a consistent check of the vehicle and identical question set, wherever and whenever they are stopped in the UK.
- Standardise training and inspection of abnormal load checks across all forces.
- Provide a better understanding of regional trends for targeted interventions.

Description

Background

A small working group was formed, made up of officers from Lancashire Police, Northumbria Police, the Central Motorway Police Group, Leicestershire Police, Gwent Police and Sussex Police.

National Highways secured each force a place on a two-day training course on abnormal loads, led by the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA). This involved classroom learning and real life scenarios.

Creating a question set for load checks

The working group made a commitment to ensure that all load checks done by officers across forces have the same question set. This is to ensure fairness, clarity and knowledge by both officers and drivers.

Following the course, a police constable designed a paper-based set of questions to assist with consolidation. This involved looking at legislation and the Independent Office of Police Conduct (IOPC) recommendations for a better understanding of how items should be moved lawfully.

Four question sets were formed, which were:

- UK-based operator escort
- non-UK based operator escort
- UK-based operator encounter
- non-UK based operator encounter

Using the Fleetcheck app to complete load checks

To align with the recommendation from the strategic review of policing, the working group recognised the need to enable officers to use 'digital skills to operate effectively in a digital environment'.

The four check sheets were uploaded to the Fleetcheck app, which is already used on police devices. This ensured that each force involved in the working group was asking a consistent set of questions.

Within the app there is an 'i' bubble for useful information, including legislation. This can be easily accessed by officers during a load check. As well as useful links, the app also provides content on the category of defects and Special Types General Orders (STGO) regulations. These are viewable under the 'support information' tab.

Once the inspection of the vehicle and the appropriate load check sheet has been completed, the officer presses 'submit' and a copy of the stop check is emailed to their inbox. An email is also sent to their supervisor and abnormal loads officer if requested.

Benefits of using an app

This is a time- and date-stamped encounter, which provides a robust audit trail that can be used as evidence at court or in civil proceedings with the Office of the Traffic Commissioner.

Previously when forces escorted an abnormal load, each force was required to complete a thorough inspection of the vehicle and load when it entered their county, prior to escorting. Forces that use the app can share the completed PDF once the inspection has been done, having the confidence that subsequent forces would ask the same questions and complete the same checks. This enables the forces to track 'on the move' loads.

Additionally, the operator is not unduly held up as it crosses each border, saving the driver and officers at least one hour per load, per force boundary.

The working group has achieved further alignment of the workstream to other police initiatives that are already established at a strategic government level. For example, alignment with the National Construction Agricultural Theft Team (NCATT) ensures that the group has early sight and implementation of any legislative changes. This has enabled partnership working at every opportunity to update officers to meet the necessary requirements. Information can therefore be added to the app and passed on to forces to meet the required standards.

Training and resources

A short training video has been made to support officers on how to use the app and the check sheets.

Should officers have any issues or miss information, the abnormal load officer or training department can review the check sheet. They can conduct professional discussions to ensure consistency and further support the officer's knowledge. If required, they can also assist the officer with their next abnormal load check.

After a 14-day free trial, the app costs £240 per year. This gives 10 officers access to the check sheets. Further officers can be given access for £2 per officer, per month.

Additionally, a portal can be accessed so that members of senior leadership teams can pull off reports to identify regional trends and increase targeted interventions. This is led within force using Fleetcheck and discussed by the working group during scheduled in-depth meetings on a quarterly basis. Information is fed back to forces where patterns occur.

Overall impact

An evaluation is being conducted by National Highways in partnership with the police. This initially involved a small focus group made up of officers from Lancashire Police, Northumbria Police, the Central Motorway Police Group, Leicestershire Police, Gwent Police and Sussex Police, as well as a National Highways staff member. This took place during the original trial that has been in operation for nearly one year.

It involved developing an understanding of legislation and tracking of loads. This included understanding what vehicle, the journey it has been on, and at what time. This is captured in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and is easily shareable between forces.

Open-ended feedback is also taken continuously via the app, as and when the need or thought arises by officers. Officers are also contacted ahead of quarterly meetings by the working group to provide open-ended feedback. Following this, the working group consider and discuss any changes that, once decided upon, will be implemented across all forces.

Key findings

- During the first year, the app has been deployed by a further five forces outside of the working group. These forces have purchased the check sheets and another force is looking to have access from September 2023, following their IT upgrade being completed. This means a quarter

of forces in the UK have signed up within the first year of its inception.

- Several operators and escort companies have also had use of the check sheets.
- There are more officers who feel confident and have adequate knowledge to stop and deal with an abnormal load.
- There is Increased engagement from the heavy haulage industry looking for educational opportunities to upskill their work force where needed.

Learning

Mechanisms that make the initiative successful

- Free text box allows officers to capture information and fair communication from heavy haulage drivers.
- Using an app that forces already use (Fleetcheck) reduces the need for additional software to use the abnormal load check sheets.
- The completed PDF can be sent to numerous email addresses automatically, which is useful for sharing information between forces to understand patterns.
- A review of each load check ensures officers are consistent with their checks, supported with access to the legislation and continuous professional development if required.

Further work and challenges

- The group recommends that the app supplements an informative abnormal load course for enforcement and escorting officers.
- The group recommends the abnormal load back office staff also receive a copy of the check sheet. This encourages further engagement with the industry to support them getting it right and hold relevant documentation on issues that have been found.
- Developing the police IT journey can take time but is worth it.
- Some forces spent a long time deciding on which budget the small amount of £240 should come out of – IT, roads policing or abnormal loads. So once approval is obtained, the group recommend deciding this as part of that approval process.
- Moving the check sheet onto the app ensures that after each quarterly review, the questions are updated instantly and to all officers and forces at the same time. This compounds the consistent approach assisting operators and officers alike.

- Further work has taken place to write policies and supporting documents. This includes training manuals (what to look at on a notification and understanding the VR1 form) and letter templates for back office staff, some of which have been translated into Polish. A PowerPoint presentation is available, which can be delivered to companies to raise their awareness and manage expectations when working with abnormal loads.
- The abnormal loads officer for each force is required to provide officer email address and collar numbers to give them access to Fleetcheck.

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Tags

Roads policing