



Owner-Operator's Business
Association of Canada

Association professionnelle des
routiers autonomes du Canada

...from the
director's chair

Running compliant a weighty problem

I never know what to expect when I answer the OBAC phone. Sometimes it's a driver passing through town who has time to meet up for a coffee, or perhaps someone calling to join OBAC or renew their membership. But mostly it's questions.

Probably two-to-one, the most common questions have something to do with Canadian weights and dimensions, which is why I keep the numbers of my weights and dimensions gurus handy. One of the most common questions, especially from our American friends and members, 'Can I run a truck in Canada with a tractor wheelbase longer than 244 inches?' is easier to answer now. The answer is yes, provided you use a formula to shorten the trailer wheelbase accordingly, and in most jurisdictions, you'll need a permit. Then a couple of weeks ago, one of our members called with what seemed a fairly straightforward query: "I have a truck with a 13,200-lb steer axle, and tires rated for 14,000 lbs. Can I run more than 12,000 lbs on a steer axle anywhere in Canada?"

Bless his compliant little heart. Here's a guy who wants to stay on the right side of the law, and naturally, I'm prepared to help.

The starting place is the more or less "national standards" document called the Heavy Truck Weight and Dimension Limits for Interprovincial Operations in Canada. Back in 1988, the federal and provincial/territorial ministers responsible for transportation endorsed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) intended to improve uniformity in regulations covering four (later increased to eight) types of commercial vehicles operating between provinces and territories on a nationwide highway system. The idea was that every province and territory would permit MoU-compliant vehicles to travel on a designated system of highways

in their jurisdiction.

But of course – since this is Canada – each jurisdiction retains authority to allow more liberal weights and dimensions, or different types of vehicle configurations, for trucking operations in their own backyard.

And just to add a bit more complexity, there are a number of regional agreements in place: the Atlantic provinces have endorsed uniform regulatory requirements throughout the region; Ontario and Quebec have established common standards on a variety of tractor-trailer combinations; and more recently, B.C., Alberta, and Saskatchewan have their own side deal on harmonization under the New West Partnership. There's a national committee called the Task Force on Vehicle Weights and Dimensions Policy whose job it is to manage the MoU and keep track of the various amendments and regional agreements. Assuming you knew about the MoU and about the Task Force, you could go to their Web sites and get the information I've just given you, and you would also find links to the weights and dimensions regulations in each province and territory.

But if you didn't know this (or didn't call me to ask), and decided to Google, say, "Canadian truck weights and dimensions," you'd get over two million hits, an intoxicating array of magazine articles, studies, and copies of regulations, most of which are useless. The first two my search found, for example, were a 2003 study by a railway association and a 2005 out-of-date copy of the MoU document. And, heaven forbid, if you searched for "12,000 lbs on a steer axle in Canada," you'd probably draw a blank because you wouldn't find pounds and steer axle and Canada in the same sentence.

But my friend's question is legitimate, and one more drivers are asking as truck weights continue to increase. Emissions systems are



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the chief culprit here, and most of the extra 1,000 lbs or so that recent emissions hardware has added to a truck has gone straight to the steer axle.

The standard steer axle weight limit for a highway truck in North America is 12,000 lbs (5,500 kgs), but now we have trucks with 13,200-lb axles (6,000 kgs), so is there anywhere in Canada where we can load the steer axle up to that weight? In other words, do the provinces recognize that steer axles have become heavier, and do they allow for that extra 1,000 lbs of weight?

I've discovered that indeed, some provinces have recognized the problem with heavier loads on steer axles on many late model trucks. B.C., Alberta, and Saskatchewan, under the New West Partnership, have agreed to increase steer axle weight to 6,000 kgs from the usual 5,500 kgs typically allowed on line-haul steer axles across the country. Ontario, as well, allows 6,000 kgs, although I had to confirm this with the resident MTO weights and dimensions expert who directed me to the specific regulation; the only reference my Web searching turned up was rules specific to LCVs.

Next to finding a place to park your truck at the end of the day, the most challenging thing is figuring out where you can operate it legally in the first place. Save yourself a bit of aggravation by checking out the Compliance/Regulatory section of the Toolbox on obac.ca. And keep those calls – and the memberships – coming.