Check Those Brakes

In late April, a fiery pileup on Interstate 70 near Denver claimed the lives of four people. The driver of the semitrailer involved told investigators that his truck's brakes failed.

It's a sobering reminder of the importance of brake safety. According to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's 2018 Pocket Guide to Large Truck and Bus Statistics, brake-related violations accounted for six of the top 10 most frequently cited vehicle violations in 2017. In the 2018 Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA) International Roadcheck, out-of-adjustment brakes and brake-system violations represented 45 percent of out-of-service vehicle violations.

The CVSA's annual Brake Safety Week is set for Sept. 15-21. Enforcement officials will conduct roadside inspections throughout North America. Be prepared. Reduce your risk for brake-related problems by regularly and thoroughly inspecting your truck's brake systems. In particular, make sure:

- All brake lines and hosing are free from cracks, breaks or crimps

- All linings, pads, drums or rotors show minor wear and meet minimum thickness requirements

- You check for any loose or missing parts

- You check for any hydraulic fluid leaks

For trucks with air brakes

- All air hoses and tubing are free from cracks, breaks or crimps

- Your air brakes maintain proper air pressure

- The low-air warning light system functions properly

- The air reservoir is mounted properly

- There are no leaks in the air brakes

- Your truck has a functioning automatic slack adjuster or self-adjusting brakes

- Air chamber sizes match across axles

For trucks with an anti-lock brake system (ABS)

- The ABS warning light functions properly (if your truck has an anti-lock braking system)

Careful inspection and proper maintenance of your truck's brake system will ensure your brakes operate properly. It also will protect you and other drivers on the road. Be sure to document any problems you see and report them to your company so a mechanic can make needed repairs.