HOW TO BOOST YOUR URBAN FLEET CUSTOMERS' EFFICIENCY DURING CHALLENGING TIMES

The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic created a surge in the demand for urban fleets. This has led to fleets needing to pay closer attention to the tire fitments, making sure they fit the right application to minimize wear and tear and maximize productivity. Providing them with proactive preventive tire maintenance will also help extend the life of tires and keep their vehicles rolling.

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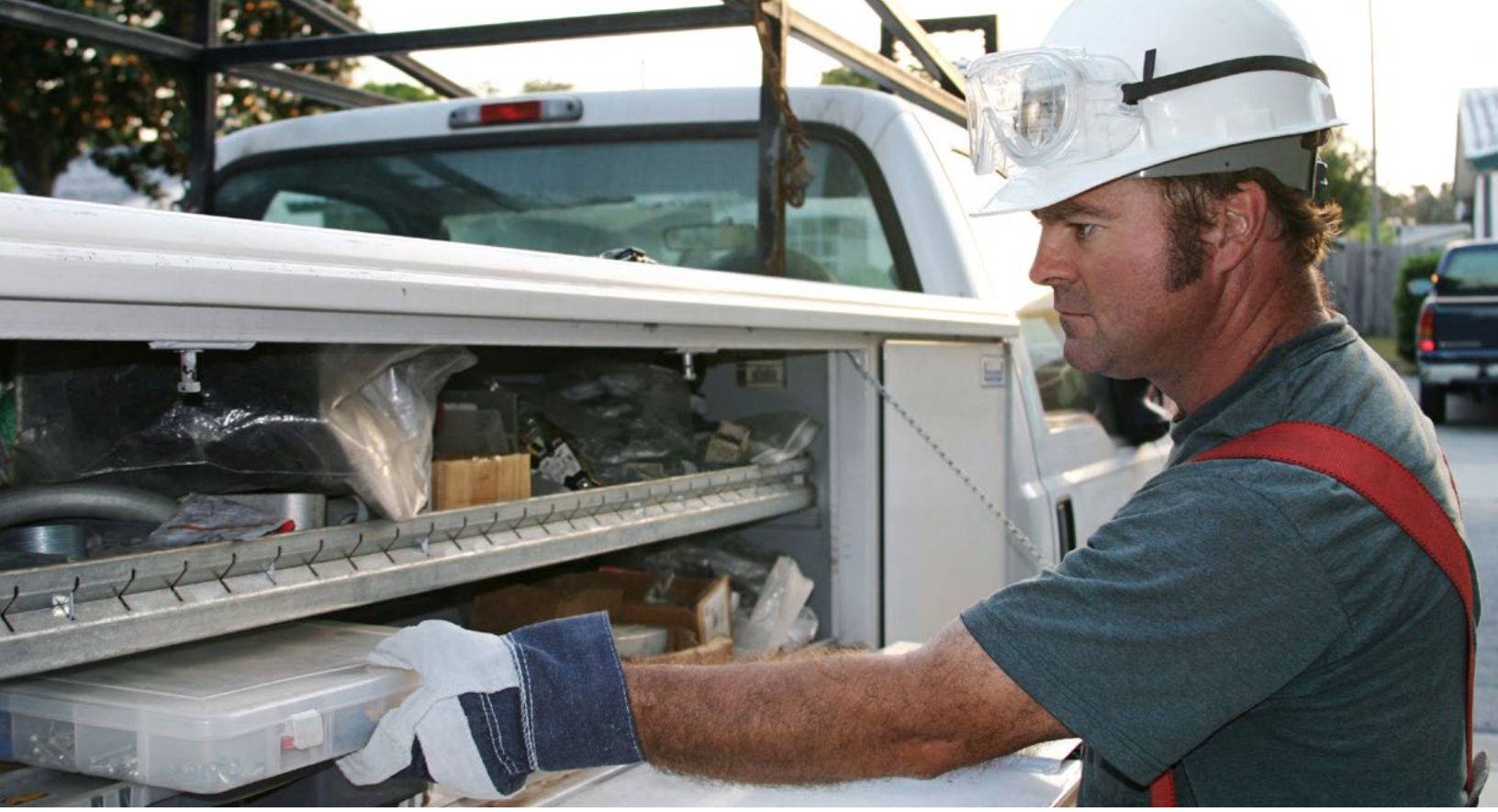

Over the past year, we have witnessed unprecedented challenges for urban fleets.

The global pandemic, which resulted in stay-at-home orders, closing of brick-and-mortar shops and restaurants, and a cratering economy, has been a driver in increasing the size of many urban fleets due to a surge in deliveries, particularly for locked-down consumers.

Urban fleets consist of about 18 million vehicles, ranging from Class 1 to Class 7, with the largest numbers in the Class 1, 2, and 3 categories, providing a wide range of functions by both commercial and government entities — from passenger transport to deliveries and service calls to waste management. For commercial fleets, the most common uses of their vehicles are for professional services and last-mile goods deliveries, the latter which has experienced explosive growth as locked-down consumers in large urban centers have turned to home delivery to get everything from food to day-to-day necessities to gifts.

While this surge has helped many companies weather the pandemic storm, it has led fleet managers — both veterans and those who may have been newly thrust into this role — to have to address unique operational challenges to fulfill the new or expanded mission of their fleets. You can help them meet these challenges by offering sound recommendations regarding their tires and tire service needs.

From an operational standpoint, there have been two speci ic challenges related to tires:

Choosing the right fitment

P, LT, or C— per the OEM

Properly maintaining tires

particularly related to wear-and-tear, as vehicle demands have increased.

EVALUATING YOUR TIRE APPLICATION

Tires are among the most misunderstood components on commercial vehicles today. Much of that misunderstanding is related to not realizing that, within the recommended tires for each vehicle, there are different weight and operational ratings designed to match the vehicle's application.

This misunderstanding can lead to fleets — particularly in urban delivery or service settings — to use the wrong type of tire for the operation; for example on a light-duty truck, using an OEM spec'd P-metric — passenger grade — tire instead of a more robust spec'd LT-metric tire for a delivery operation. This misapplication will likely lead to faster wear and tear, because passenger-grade tires — in this example — don't stand up as well to the severe duty that vehicles in urban settings can encounter, including heavy or uneven loads, tough road conditions, and incidents such as "curbing" or other contacts that will quickly wear out a passenger-grade tire.

Tire applications are also weather dependent. For example, an all-weather 3PMSF tire — in whatever variant type is recommended for the operational application — may make more sense in an urban setting, since it offers the performance qualities needed in light-packed snow versus true winter tires that are designed for more severe winter operational needs. Using an all-weather tire also cuts down on fleet expenses (no need for an extra set of seasonal tires) and potential vehicle downtime, since there is no need to switch out a non-winter tire for a winter tire.

Whatever the case, misapplication will lead to more tire failures and the need for more replacements. With tire prices increasing, it is important to help your fleet customers manage those costs. And, in addition to more costs related to tire replacements and repair, misapplications could result in higher fuel costs, other component wear and tear, and increased non-productive downtime.

To avoid downtime and tire failure, help fleets to understand the proper application of each tire type. The type of tire suited to the vehicle is set by the OEM.

Broadly, there are three tire types:

- **P-metric:** which is suited for passenger vehicles and light trucks
- **LT- metric:** which is designed for light trucks in heavier duty recreational and commercial applications
- **C-metric:** which is specifically designed for commercial purposes, most commonly found on euro-style vans used for delivery and e-commerce; a rapidly growing fitment in North America.

Further, within these categories, there are models that are rated for different applications, e.g., cargo loads, front, rear, or all-wheel drive, and it is here that fleet personnel need to carefully evaluate the tires they need.

For example, a supervisor who is driving a pickup truck designated as needing a P-metric tire, may only need to have it fit with an SL, that is, a standard load, tire as opposed to an XL or extra load tire[2].

LT-metric tires are typically found on Class 1-3 pickup trucks and have a different construction from P-metric tires by having a deeper tread depth, and are available with additional load carrying capacity within the category ranging from letters A to E. The further down the alphabet, the heavier the load these tires can bear[1].

C Metric is the European version of the LT-metric tire also designed to carry heavier loads. They were designed to carry commercial loads with a lower profile and are becoming common on commercial vans. If a van or delivery truck is designated as needing a C-metric tire, it means the tire is capable of handling heavier cargo loads, and will be better suited to the severe duty inflicted by urban routes.

Particularly as a fleet grows within the urban delivery model, it is imperative that you carefully evaluate each vehicle's application before deciding on a tire fitment. And to that end, understanding the types of tires that are appropriate within that vehicles' specs to fit the application, the terminology needed to communicate with the fleet's technicians and drivers about selecting, repairing, or replacing them is the foundation you'll need to institute to make the right, productive, safety-conscious decisions for a proper fitment.

SETTING THE RIGHT PM SCHEDULE

As with any component, it is imperative that tires are part of the vehicle's regular preventive maintenance (PM) schedule. In general, not setting a stringent, proactive PM schedule can have serious consequences for fleets, including increased downtime for vehicles, loss of productivity in the short term, and loss of customers in the long term. This is particularly the case for urban last-mile delivery or professional services companies. If they can't meet their obligations to their customers word will get out and this could significantly affect the viability of their business.

Keeping up with PM schedules is a crucial and effective way to minimize downtime and keep drivers on the road.

There are several best practices you can use to strengthen a fleet's preventive maintenance program to help increase uptime, productivity, and its bottom line, including:

- Requiring drivers to complete a comprehensive driver vehicle inspection report (DVIR) at the beginning and end of every shift. While it's only required by law for over-the-road drivers, this doesn't mean that it can't be used by urban fleets to keep an eye on key components, including tires. Schedules may be the backbone of a PM program, but keeping an eye out for emerging problems — such as a failing tire before a blowout will cut maintenance costs and minimize unscheduled downtime.
- Creating individual alerts based on time or mileage for each vehicle in the fleet and adhering to those schedules. Putting off routine maintenance may not seem like a big deal in the short term, but it could have serious implications for productivity if a vehicle has an unexpected, catastrophic breakdown due to ignoring the schedule or it could cause unintended consequences, such as a maintenance backlog increasing non-productive downtime, which will go right to the bottom line.
- Using a telematics solution to track maintenance needs based on real-world use patterns. Increasingly, telematics is becoming a key component in fleet managers' toolboxes, and can play an invaluable role in monitoring vehicle health, including tires, alerting fleet managers and other key stakeholders about a potential, emerging issue before it causes a service or delivery snarl for the company.

Drivers also play a role in keeping tires maintained and rolling. Make sure drivers not only are inspecting their vehicles' tires daily, but know how to check tire pressure and tread depth, and adhere to weight and speed ratings to maximize the life of their tires[2].

This proactive approach to monitoring tire health — as with any preventive maintenance practices — will keep vehicles on the road and drivers safe.

By not adhering to a strict, proactive tire maintenance program, fleets could suffer a c atastrophic t ire failure, which, at the very least, will sideline a driver, having them waste precious productive hours waiting for a tow truck or mobile technician, or, worse, a severe and costly crash.

A crash will undoubtedly cost a fleet significant amounts of money in direct costs. In the U.S. a driver-related injury alone will cost the fleet on average $70,000 USD; about twice the amount of an office-related workers' comp claim. A so-called "bent-metal" only crash — that is an incident that only results in damage to the vehicle — on average will cost the fleet about $15,000 USD. Adding an injury to another driver or fatality to the equation will raise these direct liability costs exponentially, potentially into the millions of dollars[3]. Indirect costs related to the brand and customers' trust in the company could be just as significant and even longer lasting.

KEEP ON ROLLING

There's little argument that today's challenges for urban fleets may seem daunting, but by addressing them head-on and with a goal to keeping its vehicles productive and safe, including choosing the right fitment for the application and implementing a proactive PM program that includes their tires, you will have helped provide a framework that will help keep their vehicles rolling.

Learn how Michelin can help determine the best fitments for urban fleets.

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Michelin, the leading mobility company, is dedicated to enhancing its clients' mobility, sustainability; designing and distributing the most suitable tires, services, and solutions for its clients' needs; providing digital services, maps, and guides to help enrich trips and travels and make them unique experiences; and developing high-technology materials that serve a variety of industries. Headquartered in Greenville, S.C., Michelin North America, Inc. (**www.michelinman.com**) has more than 21,400 employees and operates 19 major manufacturing plants.

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