

State steps up enforcement against trucks on rural roads

LANCASTER — Farmers and farm service businesses in Pennsylvania have been hit with a rash of fines for violation of state highway and bridge weight limits.

In almost all areas of the Commonwealth, the poor condition of state highways has rendered the roads and bridges unsafe for use by heavy trucks and machinery.

On major highways the

problem usually is remedied. But on the back roads and byways of the state the usual answer to a deteriorating bridge has been to post a weight limit sign rather than to increase the strength of the bridge.

It has led to some humorous situations. One bridge across the Octorara Creek in Lancaster County has posted weight limits on both approaches to the span.

But the weight limit for those driving into the county is two tons greater than for those coming the other way.

Not so funny are the fines which state police have levied against those who are caught bring grain trucks, milk tankers, bulk fertilizer trucks and other farm-related rigs across posted bridges.

Fines run \$75 for every 500 pounds a truck is over the maximum weight limit. Fines can go as high as \$10,000.

Has there really been such a big increase in police activity on posted roads?

"There is no question that I can answer that in the affirmative," said Pennsylvania Farm Power Equipment Association's George Wolff.

He points to recent Federal government action as part of the reason for the crackdown on overweight trucks.

The federal government has said individual states must show more strict enforcement of highway laws or they will not get federal cost sharing funds.

Pennsylvania, along with 12 other states, was among those to feel the crunch.

The state legislature

authorized 16 permanent scales to be put into place.

And starting June 1, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation purchased enough portable scales that they have 30 teams working across the state to weigh trucks and wagons.

"That caused quite a ripple," Wolff said.

The problem, he points out, is the method of weighing the trucks.

In the past all weighing was done on platform scales and that recorded gross weight.

Now much of the weighing is done on portable scales, and the process is based on axle weight.

The problem is most acute on the three and four axle straight trucks. On three axle trucks there are air bags rather than springs. A change in the air pressure can change the weight recorded on the scales.

Weight can be changed depending on placement of load. Wolff recommends putting the heaviest part of the load far front.

Try backing a tractor onto a flatbed, he advises, to get the heaviest part of the tractor up over the front of the trailer and reduce the

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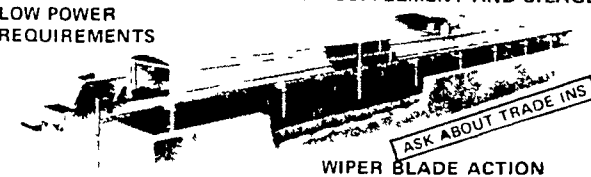
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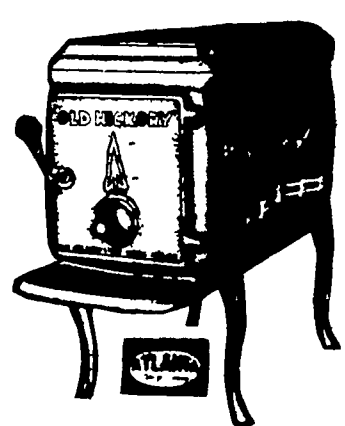


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