Preventing Transporter/Hauler Trailer Fires

There is almost nothing as devastating to a race team as a fire occurring within a fully loaded team transporter/hauler. These fires often occur at a time when the most valuable components of a race team are concentrated in a sealed trailer that may be traveling on a remote highway miles from a fire department. The transporter/hauler fires that teams have recently experienced are most easily classified into 2 areas: fire occurring within the trailer and fire beginning outside the trailer.

Fires within the trailer have involved electronic devices and their batteries, vehicle batteries, and stocks of spare portable device batteries. There have also been fires within the trailer wiring itself when the trailer is being powered by the on-board generator while in transit. The device-battery produced fires can occur while they are being charged in transit, when they are transported haphazardly off of or out of the device and are jostled or forced together due to trailer movement. The batteries may short circuit resulting in overheating or sparking due to the movement of the hauler. Concerning batteries; many airlines and shipping companies have restricted the shipping and transport of lithium batteries due to this phenomenon.

Fires that begin outside the confines of the trailer and spread to the interior due to their intensity are occurring from failures or problems associated with the mechanical aspects of specific trailer components; overheated running gear, overheated trailer brakes and tire failures. A combination of factors often comes into play that allow for these hauler equipment related fires to begin and rapidly grow to massive proportions producing extreme heat, smoke and flames even when detected and responded to quickly.

Tips for preventing battery, portable equipment and electrical system related fires:

- Transport battery powered portable devices, laptop computers, walkie-talkies, etc. in an organized manner (stacked, boxed or on racks) within the hauler, do not transport spare batteries or battery powered devices haphazardly within plastic bins that will allow them to move about freely possibly making contact-to-contact connections during the trip.
- Do not charge portable items during transport.
- Do not transport battery operated devices on material that could absorb heat and create combustion. For example, laptops should not ride on the upholstered seating of the forward meeting space or the meeting space tabletop.
- Portable items, i.e., lights, golf carts, should only be transported in the “off” position.
• Transportation of LP gas grills is not recommended, however, if being done, must only be done once the entire grill unit is cool to the touch, the LP gas cylinder is turned off and disconnected from the supply hose and with all cylinders secured upright to prevent movement.
• Properly discard any soiled rags or towels especially any that may have become contaminated with fuels, lubricants or petroleum based products.

Tips for preventing transporter/hauler running gear related fires:

• Always perform an inspection of the rear wheels of the hauler; first as a part of the required DOT inspection and whenever stopped during travel; use all your senses, touch, sight and smell to verify that the transporter components are in good condition and performing as expected.
• Frequently check your rearview mirrors concentrating on the rear wheels and area behind the rear wheel for signs of smoke or other problems.
• Be aware of other drivers signaling to you in some manner that you may be having a problem, often other drivers may detect the strong odor of burning components when driving behind or in close proximity to your rig and attempt to alert you to the condition.

As a final reminder allow time for all competition related equipment and competition vehicles to cool down prior to loading them into the hauler.