

# Are you in control?

**Tire pressure control systems can keep you in business longer, reduce maintenance costs on both rig and road, and new evidence suggests they can be paid for in gravel savings alone. What is the industry waiting for?**

**By James Menzies**



The Canadian forest industry pioneered the use of tire pressure control systems (TPCS), and now the technology is being explored in Sweden and Finland as well. Here at home, the use of TPCS is becoming more widely accepted amongst log haulers who are beginning to see the benefits of an extended hauling season and reduced wear and tear on equipment.

TPCS allows truckers to adjust tire pressures while their truck is in motion. A truck's tire pressure can be lowered on an unpaved road, and then raised back to its original PSI when the truck reaches the main highway. Altering the tire pressure based on the road type and the weight of the load allows a driver to improve traction while reducing drive train stresses and providing a more comfortable ride.

Operating with lower pressures on logging roads creates a larger footprint (the part of the tire that is in contact with the road surface), which has proven to reduce road damage.

A study by the USDA Forest Service found that logging road maintenance costs could be shaved by 62% thanks to the use of TPCS.

## Who benefits?

When mills first began urging their trucking contractors to adopt TPCS (more commonly referred to as central tire inflation at the time), they were initially greeted with plenty of resistance. After all, these things aren't cheap, with systems costing in the neighbourhood of \$10,000 for a tandem-axle tractor and about \$15,000-



*Tire pressure control helps keep this truck from getting stuck. The systems have also been used to dramatically reduce the amount of gravel required for logging roads.*

\$17,000 to equip a B-train.

"Why should we pay thousands of dollars so you can reduce your road maintenance costs?" was the common question truckers posed to the mills they hauled for. But since then, the attitude of trucking companies towards TPCS has changed, and they are now reaping benefits themselves.

Michael Mallock, a contractor with Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries (Al-Pac), recalls the way the mill first introduced TPCS.

"When we started using it back in 1992, (TPCS) was a requirement to work for Al-Pac," he recalls. "It was very much forced upon us here."

Truckers had two choices: Pony up the funds to equip their trucks with TPCS, or go find someone else to haul logs for. (To its credit, Al-Pac increased haul rates to offset some of the initial start-up costs).

Thirteen years later, Mallock doesn't

need to be told to use TPCS – it's now on every one of his rigs, including chip trucks that aren't required to carry the system.

"I put it on all my trucks whether it's required or not because I understand the payback," says Mallock.

For truckers, the payback comes in many forms. Firstly and most importantly, is the extended hauling season. Tembec began urging its trucking contractors to consider TPCS in 2003.

"It was presented as a personal business opportunity," says Duke Armleder, technical manager with Tembec in Cranbrook, BC. Tembec offered its truckers the opportunity to continue hauling wood into the mill for a longer period of time if their trucks were equipped with TPCS. At first, there were few takers.

"The majority of our contractor fleet didn't buy-in that first year," Armleder admits. Only 11 trucks took advantage

of the opportunity in 2003 but the very next year that number had increased to 19. Now, 20 out of the 58 trucks hauling for Tembec in Cranbrook are equipped with TPCS.

"The biggest advantage for the contractors is the extended season, that's how they're going to pay for the investment," Armleder says.

Some of the TPCS-equipped trucks were suddenly able to haul year-round while others extended their hauling season by two or three months.

"I just got feedback the other day from one of the first guys to put it on," Armleder says. "He says he used to have to work like a dog for eight months of the year. Now it's so much easier for him having 10 or 11 months of hauling and having money in his pocket after the shortened break-up period."

For its part, Tembec has also been able to capitalize on the extended season, improving productivity and keeping lower inventories.

But Mallock said an increased hauling season isn't the only benefit of

TPCS for trucking contractors.


Tires are a trucker's highest operating cost after fuel, and TPCS has proven to extend tire life by 30-40%. Mallock says he has documented a tire life increase of 40,000 km on a set of drive tires. He has also found it easier to retain drivers thanks to the improved ride trucks with TPCS provide. Drivers also appreciate the little things, like having to chain-up less often and avoid the embarrassment of getting pulled out of the mud.

Tire pressure control systems will also generally outlast the life of a truck. Mallock has several systems that have outlived three or four tractors.

"By the end of the second truck, it has definitely paid for itself," he insists. And that's in a year-round operation – the payback period will be accelerated for a contractor that is able to extend his hauling season by a month or two with the use of TPCS.

Proof of the benefits of this technology keeps pouring in, helping a cash-strapped industry make what is becoming an increasingly easy decision

to install the systems on its fleets. FERIC has long studied the technology, and recently completed field trials that showed considerably less gravel can be used on roads being traveled by TPCS-equipped rigs. Trials have shown roads with 25% less gravel holding up just fine, making the payback very fast indeed, and all the other benefits discussed in this column a bonus. The research organization is also looking at the possibility of reducing fuel consumption by using TPCS.

Les Hinz, vice-president of Canadian-based manufacturer Tire Pressure Control International, says other industries are taking notice and the use of TPCS is gaining momentum in oil patch and concrete mixer applications as well. 


*The Log Haul is a regular column on log hauling issues and technology. James Menzies is executive editor of Canada's leading trucking magazines, Truck News and Truck West. He writes this column exclusively for CFI Magazine. He can be reached at [jmenzies@trucknews.com](mailto:jmenzies@trucknews.com).*

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