

# Safe and professional

**With the launch of its new guide to mobile off-site working, IRTE has spelt out required standards and practices not only for technicians but also for third parties using their services.**

**Brian Tingham reports**

**N**ew guidelines for commercial vehicle technicians working off-site have been launched by the IRTE (Institute of Road Transport Engineers) in association with Bullwell Trailer Solutions, a subsidiary of Ryder Europe providing mobile trailer repair and maintenance services. The institute's new 'Mobile off-site working good practice guide' covers aspects ranging from technician safety and competence to site conditions, tools and equipment, spillage and contamination prevention, and the importance of dynamic risk assessments.

IRTE professional sector council chair John Eastman expects the new publication - which has already been endorsed by the National Tyre Distributors' Association - to be used across the industry wherever vehicle inspection, maintenance and repair are carried out away from companies' own workshops. Pointing to the fact that standards can differ widely between on- and off-site working - according to location, weather and factors such as organisations' own practices - he adds that it should raise the bar. "This new guide details acceptable industry

standards specifically for off-site working in any environment. It facilitates best practice in areas that may historically have fallen short of meeting such standards," he says.

Eastman, who personally helped develop the new guidelines, explains that the IRTE Technical Committee believes they are important not only in terms of assuring continuity of professional engineering standards in what can be challenging environments, but also facilitating technician safety.

## **GOLD STANDARD**

The overarching objective, he says, is to ensure that standards associated with working in the controlled situation of purpose-built workshops are not degraded or lost in the mobile environment. That includes when working without cover - whether maintaining or inspecting technicians' own or other organisations' vehicles. And he adds that the new guidance

also extends to ensuring compliance with current safety standards, including (where relevant) working at height.

Looking in a little detail, the new guide starts by observing that, because technicians must be able to assess aspects including site conditions and equipment, IRTE recommends that anyone working off-site be trained and proven competent to a suitable level. It suggests independent assessments such as irtec and C&G Unit 213.

That said, beyond acquainting themselves with relevant site procedures and obtaining permits to work, technicians and their employers each have a responsibility to consider the requirements of each situation and task. That not only means assessing the tools and equipment required (including personal protective equipment, health and safety facilities, and spillage containment and appropriate cleaning equipment), but also whether the job can be properly completed safely



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off-site, and in the timeframe allocated.

Above all, the guide suggests that technicians must feel confident that it is safe to work on designated vehicles. That means giving consideration to details such as: the location of the vehicle(s); access, including whether surrounding vacant space might become occupied by other vehicles during work; and any potential for impact by other vehicles. Obvious precautions include setting up clear safety zones.

However, other key issues, it warns, include weather conditions, and the stability and cleanliness of the working surface. Technicians are counselled to beware of injury risks (to themselves and others) as well as anything likely to compromise the quality of work.

Overall, the IRTE guide advises that, before any work is undertaken, a signed risk assessment must be provided by the employer and completed by the employee. However, it also recommends that technicians make themselves aware of specific risk factors and any potential for change on the ground. Under the general banner 'dynamic risk assessments', the guide suggests paying attention to vehicle security and immobilisation, but also on-site communications processes, requirements for on-site assistance, ensuring adequate power and light provision, etc. It also offers examples of dynamic risk assessment forms and associated content.

"The launch of this mobile off-site working guide is pivotal to the next stage of development of the UK transport industry," comments Shaun Stephenson, president of the SOE (Society of Operations Engineers, the umbrella organisation for the IRTE). "The next phase is the development of the irtec standard for mobile workers. This will be the first in the industry and will raise our profile significantly." 

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Gary Bulley

## Mobile working with irtec

The IRTE 'Mobile off-site working good practice guide' was developed with Bullwell Trailer Solutions, a subsidiary of Ryder Europe. Bullwell managing director Gary Bulley says the project represented a natural fit, given his company's existing work on ensuring and enforcing common standards of repair across its fleet of trailers.

"Our aim is, and always has been, to bring a level of quality and consistency to the trailer industry, and working with the IRTE to deliver this guide goes a long way to achieving that goal," states Bulley. "Not only does this act as an endorsement of the standards we uphold at Bullwell, but, by combining our knowledge and expertise with that of the IRTE, we are driving the industry forward for mobile engineers."

Bulley also believes that the IRTE's irtec licensing scheme - which assesses the competency, currency and safety of commercial vehicle technicians - has a central part to play in raising standards for mobile working. Not only is the new guidance designed to facilitate the correct working environment to achieve irtec-grade inspections, but also irtec, he says, is key to changing any perception that trailer technicians are the least qualified of commercial vehicle engineers.

"There's no reason why we should expect any less quality from technicians working on trailers than others working on hydraulics and electronics. Similarly, there's no reason why people should expect a lower level of quality from mobile working than from technicians in workshops. Quite often engineers working off site have to undergo more training. So they are experts in many fields rather than specialists in one."

Therefore, irtec accreditation, he says, will prove the point. "I strongly believe that by adopting irtec and these guidelines for mobile working, we can help combat these outdated stereotypes and, by doing so, drive the trailer - and HGV industry as a whole - forward."

Shaun Stephenson, president of the SOE (Society of Operations Engineers, the umbrella organisation for the IRTE), agrees, and adds that working with Ryder and Bullwell Trailer Solutions has been mutually beneficial. With mobile practices having been at the forefront of both businesses, he says, their knowledge and input on best practice for engineers involved in off-site working has been a great help. "I look forward to continuing to work with Ryder and Bullwell Trailer Solutions over the coming months and years."



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