

VOSA chief executive Alastair Peoples asked delegates at the IRTE Conference 2012 to redouble their efforts, in order to keep first-time pass rates and vehicle standards improving

“**T**here is a real opportunity to work together and get the transport industry to improve its compliance and safety record.” These were among words of encouragement and exhortation from Alastair Peoples, chief executive of VOSA (Vehicle and Operator Services Agency) at the IRTE Conference 2012.

Peoples highlighted recent work carried out by VOSA to drive up first-time pass rates, citing OCRS (Operator Compliance Risk Score), testing standards and manuals now online, and simplification of the

Question of compliance

headlamp aim test. These and other measures, he asserted, have made a real difference.

“Between 2000 and 2008, our HGV annual test pass rate was more or less static, with only 2% variation [33.4% vs 35.7%]. But between 2008 and 2011, we saw a vast improvement in the condition of the heavy vehicle fleet presented for test,” stated Peoples. And he professed himself hopeful that this will continue when the numbers for 2012 are available. However, he also warned against complacency, referring to disappointing roadworthiness figures still being found after testing.

“Three months after passing their MoTs, 10% of the HGVs targeted by VOSA have reached a condition that is endangering other road users,” revealed Peoples. “This is unacceptable. We must work harder to ensure that the HGV fleet remains compliant throughout the year and not just on the one day vehicles are brought to us for testing.”

So, how? “We estimate that 80% of roadside prohibitions can be prevented by improving attention to the daily walk-around check – which is a major factor in finding defects before we do,” stated Peoples. For him, drivers are critical here.

And make no mistake, he said, statistics for foreign operators’ vehicle compliance are now virtually on a par with those of their UK counterparts. “The picture at the roadside is changing, as are prohibition rates,” stated Peoples. “Historically, compliance rates for British operators were better than those for non-UK operators. But the two are

now not that dissimilar. Our prohibition rates have gone up, because we target much better, and, while it is good that first-time pass rates have improved, quality needs to be there throughout.”

Beyond the walk-around check, though, Peoples urged operators to pay attention to all aspects of fleet operations, including drivers’ hours and vehicle loading. “If we rest on our laurels, it will be much more difficult to defend restrictions on foreign operations within the UK,” he warned.

Moving on to workshop maintenance, Peoples reiterated VOSA’s support for the irtec technician licensing scheme, acknowledging that it has been instrumental in raising standards at source. “As I said at the awards ceremony for the IRTE Skills Challenge, operators that invest in good staff and good systems demonstrate to me that they want to be compliant,” he said. “That sends me a very clear indication of the risk score they might end up with.”

Finally, on the subject of ATFs (Authorised Testing Facilities), Peoples said: “Experience has shown that ATFs are helping to improve compliance rates. More pass first time at ATFs than at other VOSA sites.” Why? Because vehicles are tested on identical equipment to that used by VOSA. Also, faults are unlikely to occur between preparation and testing.

For Peoples though, the bottom line is that VOSA is keen to work with operators to raise standards. But for those unwilling to listen, there is now the double threat of a move ‘straight to red’ on OCRS – as well as referral to the traffic commissioners.

