

Trucking in the Oil and Gas Industry

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Introduction

A 1995 study on truck driver training prepared for Lakeland College found that trucking is a growing industry across Canada and that there is a strong demand for well trained, experienced drivers. While there are many driver training programs available, these do not appear to satisfy the need for well-qualified drivers.

Within the trucking industry there are a large number of operators who specialize in oilfield hauling and other oil and gas industry services in northern Alberta. The predicted increases in oilfield activity across northern Alberta may well give rise to an increased demand for truckers who are trained to serve this industry. In addition, many companies are starting to insist on certain levels of training on the part of the contractors whom they hire. This report examines the training opportunities that may arise from the combination of these factors.

Methods

Data for this report comes from interviews with individuals involved in teaching in this field as well as from a survey of trucking companies specializing in oilfield services.

Existing training

All drivers in the industry are required to have taken a number of basic, safety-related courses such as Transportation of Dangerous Goods, Workplace Hazardous Materials Information Systems, H2S Alive and First Aid; much the same as other employees in the oil and gas industry. These courses are available throughout northern Alberta.

The most widely recognized industry-specific training program is the General Oilfield Driver Improvement (GODI) program developed by the Petroleum Industry Training Service (PITS). This course covers a number of aspects of the oilfield trucking including: defensive driving; regulations; safety code requirements; vehicle equipment operations off-highway driving; road hazards; and many others. The course is taught under licence by several private instructors in the North as well as by Grande Prairie Regional College (GPRC), AVC - Lesser Slave Lake, and Fairview College. Successful completion of this course results in certification valid for three years and qualifies the student for a reduction of three demerit points from his or her driver's license.

GPRC also offers a PITS-designed course in Oilfield Hauling. This course focuses on the various types of trucks and particular equipment used in oilfield trucking.

Employment

Employment figures for oilfield trucking in northern Alberta are not available. However, the trucking industry in Alberta is strong and growing, and the oil and gas industry in northern Alberta is expected to remain strong for the next few years. Nonetheless, most of the oilfield trucking companies surveyed for this report are not counting on significant growth. Many of the respondents are hopeful for the future and none of them expect to reduce their staff over the next three years, but they are all keeping watchful eyes on the price of oil.

Training Demand

In the general trucking industry there is no mandated training standard for drivers. Many people see this lack of a standard as one of the reasons that it is often hard for trucking companies to find well-trained, experienced drivers. As Bob Drinnan of the Alberta Trucking Association points out, friends and relatives remain the most popular driving instructors. While trucking companies want to see better trained drivers, without set industry standards truckers may remain reluctant to take extensive, and expensive, training courses.

Companies in the oil and gas industry are moving to establish training standards for oilfield truckers. The Petroleum Services Association of Canada (PSAC) and the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) officially endorsed GODI training as the standard for the industry as of July 1, 1996. Many member companies have chosen to insist that their contractors hire GODI-certified drivers. Oil industry organizations hope that adopting a training standard will improve the baseline skill level of drivers in the industry. Currently, trucking is the segment of the oil and gas industry with the highest rate of accidents. The major cause of spills, according to one industry representative, is driver error.

It will take some time for the industry as a whole to fully endorse GODI as a necessary training standard, particularly in northern Alberta. Only one survey respondent reported that their customers insisted upon having GODI-certified drivers. One other company reported that, while it is not a formal requirement, having GODI-certified drivers is a strong selling point for their customers. Doug Massing of PSAC hopes that in two or three years, some 60 to 70% of oil and gas companies will insist that their contractors have GODI-certified drivers. This process may take longer in the North. Richard English of PITS suggested that company operations that are far away from the corporate headquarters in Calgary or Edmonton are more likely to hire according to “local custom” rather than according to a new corporate policy.

Not surprisingly, the endorsement of GODI as an industry standard has not had an immediate effect on the demand for the course in northern Alberta. Many of the GODI courses offered by northern colleges this past spring were not delivered due to lack of students. Likewise, the Oilfield Hauling course offered by Grande Prairie has not proven popular so far. The current demand level will make it difficult for colleges to enter this market, especially as there are many private trainers offering the course. The one company surveyed whose customers insist on certified drivers has a GODI instructor on staff.

Implications for Training

There is a potential market for training in oilfield hauling over the next few years but colleges will have to work with industry in order to develop it. On one hand, Richard English suggested that producers are more likely to endorse the training if they know that it is available. On the other, if the new training standards are endorsed by producers throughout the region then contractors will recognize the need to train more of their personnel. So far, only a small percentage of drivers working for companies responding to our survey have taken the GODI training. By coordinating their course offerings with producers and contractors, colleges may be able to both encourage, and serve, a new demand for oilfield driver training.

Without such a coordinated effort, this market will likely be slow to develop.

Sources

Sharon Stredwick, "Truck Driver Training" Prepared for Taras Saruk, Development Unit, Lakeland College, Vermilion, AB, June 1995.

Contacts

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Bob Drinnan, Alberta Trucking Association, 253-8401.

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