

ONE BAD BRAKE CAN PARK THE WHOLE TRUCK

The No. 1 out-of-service violation in the country — and one defect parks a rear loader.

SAFETY ITEM — DO THIS FIRST

This is a safety issue, and DOT will check it. Brakes are the first thing an inspector goes to, and it can park the truck on the spot. Put it at the front of your PM list, ahead of everything else on it.

Your odometer does not know how many times you stopped. Your brake drums do.

A highway tractor may apply its service brakes twice in a working day. A refuse truck makes 200 to 300 heavy applications in a single shift at 450 to 500 °F, over 800 to 1,200 stops — which is why refuse units see 40% to 60% shorter lining life. Engine hours, PTO hours, and stop counts predict brake wear better than miles.

THE 20% RULE — WHY IT PUNISHES REFUSE TRUCKS

If 20% or more of the service brakes on the unit have any defective condition, the whole truck is out of service until every defective brake is repaired and reinspected. A ten-brake combination has room to be imperfect. A two-axle rear loader does not.

YOUR TRUCK	SERVICE BRAKES	ONE DEFECT EQUALS	DEFECTS THAT TRIGGER OOS
Rear loader / cab & chassis, 2 axles	4	25% — already out of service	1
Front loader or ASL, 3 axles	6	16.7% — under the line	2
Roll-off with pusher / tag axle	8	12.5%	2
Tractor and trailer combination	10	10%	2

WHAT ENFORCEMENT FOUND THIS YEAR

39.1%

of all vehicle out-of-service violations were brake-related

1 in 7

trucks parked on one unannounced inspection day

15.1%

out of service in Brake Safety Week checks

CVSA's 2026 Out-of-Service Criteria took effect April 1, 2026 and supersede every earlier version.

THE NINETY-SECOND YARD CHECK — FOR DRIVERS

No driver is measuring lining thickness at 5 AM. This is what a driver can do before the truck leaves the yard:

- 1 Listen to air build and leak-down. Air loss that was not there last week is a defect forming.
- 2 Look behind the wheels. Oil or grease on a drum or rotor face means a leaking seal.
- 3 Feel the first stop. A pull to one side leaving the yard is one brake doing another brake's work.
- 4 Check for heat after the route. A wheel-end hotter than the others is dragging — and a dragging brake cracks drums.
- 5 Report it the same day. Caught in the yard it is a shop repair. Caught on the road it is a missed route.

THE FIVE DEFECTS THAT TAG REFUSE TRUCKS

What the inspector measures — and what your shop should be doing first.

DEFECT	WHAT THE INSPECTOR MEASURES	WHAT YOU SHOULD BE DOING
1. Lining and pad thickness	Air drum linings below 1/4 in. at the thinnest point, or worn past the wear indicator. On air disc, the limit is 1/16 in. (1.6 mm).	Measure — do not eyeball. Lining that passes at a Monday PM can be under spec by month-end at 300 applications a day.
2. Cracked and heat-checked drums	A crack longer than half the width of the friction surface is out of service. Spiderweb heat checking means hard braking or poor cooling.	Pull a wheel on your worst-duty units at PM. Replace in axle sets, and find out why it got hot — usually a dragging mate or a lazy adjuster.
3. Rusted or cracked air disc rotors	Severe rust across the whole friction surface, cracks reaching either edge, metal-to-metal grooving, or wear into the center vents. The most common defect found on the 2026 brake inspection day.	Light rust and minor surface cracks are normal — a crack running to the edge is not. Teach the difference, because this one hides until a light is put on it.
4. Pushrod stroke and slack adjusters	Stroke measured per axle with the system at 90 to 100 psi.	Put chalk-mark stroke checks on the PM sheet as a number written in the box — not a checkmark. One lazy adjuster overloads the rest.
5. Contamination and air leaks	Oil or grease on the friction surface, audible leaks at the chamber, cut or chafed air hose and tubing.	A weeping wheel seal is a brake job waiting to happen. Fix the seal and the lining together or you will do the work twice.

“A brake shoe is a couple hundred dollars. A missed Tuesday route is a customer conversation.” You do not need a catastrophic failure to lose the truck. You need one worn lining and a short axle count — and the inspector decides, not you.

BRING US YOUR WORST-DUTY TRUCK.

RDK Service will measure lining and pad thickness, check drums and rotors against the current out-of-service criteria, verify pushrod stroke at pressure, and give you a written condition report you can plan a PM cycle around.

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