



Ethan Valentine, an equipment cleaning tech, works on cleaning a tank at Highway Transport on Middlebrook Pike on Oct. 4.
PHOTOS BY CAITIE MCKEIN/NEWS SENTINEL

Trucking firm making driving more efficient

New tech monitors temperature of chemicals inside tanks

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A Knoxville-based trucking company is implementing new strategies to make long-haul trucking more efficient for drivers across the country.

Highway Transport, a long-haul chemical trucking company, partnered with Anytreck, a GPS tracking company, to develop a new technology called TempTrack, which actively monitors and reports the temperature of the chemicals inside the tanks, Chief Operating Officer Steve Smith told Knoxville News.

Some chemicals need to be kept in very specific conditions and temperatures to avoid spoiling and changing state. Previously, drivers needed to pull over every couple of hours to check the temperature of the contents of their 6,000-gallon tank.

Now, the temperature can be tracked and controlled remotely, cutting down on drive time and

improving driver safety.

"There are more tools available to do network optimization to monitor the temperature of the product. Whenever that's come out, we have been at the forefront," Smith said. "If this can help us serve a customer better, and provide them more information, make our own time service better, we want to be a part of it."

Highway Transport has 500 trucks and 1,000 tanks in service, Smith said. The company has 156 employees in the Knoxville area and 622 nationwide.

Relay network implemented

In addition to TempTrack, Highway Transport has implemented several new strategies to be more efficient with its time, more ecofriendly and employee friendly.

The company uses a relay network, or stopping points between destinations, that spans

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Steve Smith, COO, and Christy Williams, SVP of Sales and Marketing at Highway Transport, pose for a photo at their location on Middlebrook Pike.

Trucking

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from southwest to the northeast, Smith said. It's not a typical practice and there are only a few bulk chemical companies that use a relay network.

Drivers within 500 miles of each other are hired for a job, where they will meet at a relay point and swap loads. It cuts down on the delivery time and makes sure drivers are carrying loads two ways, not just full one way and empty back.

The eight relay points are open five days a week, with one in East Tennessee and another in Middle Tennessee.

The relay network and updated tracking devices allow drivers to know exactly how far they will have to drive and when they will be back. It creates a better work-life balance, and Smith said it should help the company recruit and retain employees.

"Back in the '70s and '80s, every truck driver's dream was to squat and drive the country and see it for free, and there wasn't as much traffic and there wasn't many people cutting them off," Smith said. "It was a much different environment. Now drivers want to be home every night."

Highway Transport has service centers to drop off and repair trucks in Knoxville and Chattanooga. Its network extends across 10 states.

The company is 60 days into a 90-day pilot program of Idle Smart, a system made by a company in Kansas City that monitors the temperature of the cabin when the engine is off but will turn on to heat or cool the cabin to the desired temperature of the driver, then turn off once that temperature has been reached. It's a more efficient use of the battery and cuts down on emissions, Smith said.

With the money the company saves on fuel, Smith said, the Idle Smart system pays for itself in a week.

Chemical transport is a niche industry and it's the only service Highway Transport delivers. The company was founded in 1948.

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