



**DASH CAMERAS CAN IMPROVE SAFETY AND REDUCE LIABILITY**

*Safety: Transportation*

*February 2015*

**INTRODUCTION:** Bob and Kim Wall, owners of Wall Timber in Osyka, Mississippi, have taken an innovative step by installing dash (windshield) cameras in their 29 tractor-trailer rigs and in some of their crew trucks. In a short time, this technology has shown its potential to improve the safety and reduce the high risk and liability exposure of trucking in the logging industry.

**GENERAL FEATURES:** We began research on these cameras in September of 2014, after watching a news segment showing how a trucker's camera recorded an accident in front of him and proved how the accident really happened, not as all the different witnesses reported it. In October of 2014 we installed the cameras.

We went to Custom Audio, McComb, Mississippi, spoke to Bobby McDaniel, and selected this firm as the installer. The camera model that Custom Audio installed was Top



*Fig. 1: Dash Cam is inconspicuously mounted near the top of the windshield on the passenger side.*



*Fig. 2: The video camera "sees what the driver sees" through the windshield.*

Dawg GPS 1080P DVR Dash Cam (see <http://www.topdawgelectronics.com/top-dawg-gps-1080p-dvr-dash-cam/>). We elected to install the cameras on the passenger-side windshield with a tamper proof mount and cable, although these cameras may be installed just by plugging them into a cigarette lighter.

This camera records the driver's view and even has audio to record everything on a driver's shift. GPS on this system has the ability to track video playback with Google Maps, showing the truck's location as well as its speed and direction. The video is recorded on a micro memory card in AVI format, suitable for playing back on a PC, laptop, or TV using the AV cable, the included HDMI cable, or USB 2.0 cable. This camera also features G-sensor technology, which can detect an impact or collision and will automatically save and lock the video file recorded 20 seconds prior to and after the impact onto the SD card.

**OPERATION:** Drivers do not turn the camera on or off; it is running when the truck is running or idling. We upgraded the SD card to enable it to record in 8-hour loops. While in the truck, the Dash Cam displays what the driver is seeing on the 1.5-inch LCD screen. To view an SD card, one need only stop the engine, take the card out, and view it on a computer. We bought extra SD cards, so when we want to view a card, we just install the extra one. We also bought extra cards so if an incident occurs we can keep the original on file. One may also copy files onto a flash drive.

**APPLICATION:** Insurance costs in the logging industry are high, and the trucking/auto category is almost always the highest, due to these vehicles' exposure to the public. This system will help prevent fraudulent claims against your drivers and trucks. The video evidence gives proof to your insurance carrier that your driver and truck are obeying the law. Since this system makes our drivers more aware of their driving, we feel it also represents a safety improvement. Furthermore, it helps the woods crew's awareness—they know if a truck is pointing in their direction, they are on camera!

High liability exposures threaten cost-effective trucking. Video evidence of this type can prove your truck was obeying the speed limit, was on the proper side of the road, did obey the traffic lights, signs, and so on. It can also verify the other driver's actions. In short, the camera is your witness—not humans who make mistakes, forget, and can be swayed.

At first, the drivers did not want these cameras at all, because to them it seemed as if we were spying on them rather than protecting them. However, after the first incident (described below), in which the video record overturned a driver's ticket, several drivers became convinced that the advantages were overwhelming. Then after a second incident (also described below), only a few drivers are still unhappy about the camera.



*Fig. 3: Dash Cam lens faces out through the windshield.*

**SPECIFICATIONS AND COST:** This system, with the improvements we selected, such as longer-playing SD cards professionally installed with tamper-proof mounts and cables, cost \$275 per unit, including Custom Audio's setting up our office computer and providing a demonstration.<sup>1</sup> Custom Audio came to our shop and installed the cameras after work hours, so installation did not shut any of our trucks down.

We feel that this system has already paid for itself, as the following two incidents show:

Two days after installing Dash Cams, we received a call about a sideswipe with another tractor/trailer (oversize rig with escort vehicle). Our driver called 911, took pictures with his accident camera from his truck's kit, and did all the other correct procedures. When the authorities arrived, the other party stated he had three witnesses who claimed that our driver was speeding and over the yellow line into oncoming traffic. Our driver was ticketed based on these

<sup>1</sup> Price subject to change without notice.

witnesses' word. When our driver returned to the office, after his post-accident drug test, we viewed the card. We discovered that the escort vehicle with two witnesses was well in front of the other truck, so there was no way they could have seen the accident. Additionally, the other truck was on the yellow line and his mirrors were extended well over the yellow line. Our driver was doing 51mph in a 55 mph zone and was on his side of the yellow line.

In a second, very recent, incident, our office received a call from a woman stating that one of our trucks had thrown a rock into her windshield, shattering it and getting glass on her, and causing her to drive off the road. Having explained to her that the incident appeared to be a normal "road hazard" (which her own insurance should cover) and having given her our insurance agent's name and number, we retrieved the card from the unit in question. By that time, she had called our agent and told a different story, claiming that our driver had forced her off the road, that something had fallen off the truck, and other assertions.

Upon viewing the video, we found where she stopped our driver. Although she approached the truck from the rear, so she is not visible in the video, the audio picked her up. She could be heard telling the driver that a rock had hit her windshield but saying nothing about the driver forcing her off the road or that anything had fallen from the truck. From the audio recording it was also clear that she had not been hurt in any way. Our driver's identifying himself, providing our phone number, and providing his explanation of "road hazard" to her were also all on the tape. We went back over the entire morning's worth of the tape and discovered that at no point did our driver meet this car on the road or veer onto a driveway edge where he could have thrown up a rock or other object.

Each of these incidents saved the insurance company from paying a false claim, kept our insurance costs down, and protected the driver's record.

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