

Interstate weight restrictions

What are they and are they making a difference?

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HAMPTON ROADS, Va. (WAVY) - The Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) uses mobile weigh scales designed to give flexibility with enforcement, but the DMV units are stretched so thin the question is, how effective is the DMV's Mobile Scales Unit? And what damage does an overweight load do to the road?

To find the answer to those questions, WAVY.com tagged along with Virginia State Police and the DMV to watch them bust truckers with over-weight loads.

"Chesapeake, I'm going to be pulling a dump truck," says Virginia State Trooper James Ogden. Ogden then hits 110 miles per hour in pursuit of a truck he thinks is overweight.

"You can see bulging tires and that's a good indication the truck is overweight. The tires will be bulging so much they nearly touch," Says Ogden.

Ogden quickly pulls in behind the truck that's driven by Willie Vann. We asked Vann why he's driving with a such a heavy load. Vann's reply: "I knew it was heavy, but I gotta feed my family." When asked if he was aware of weight limits, Vann said, "I was aware of the law, but I'm not the only one out here doing it."

State police work hand-in-hand with the DMV's Mobile Scale Unit. Patrol Manager Curtis Pulley works with Weight Technician Jason Harrell. They're one of 12 units across Virginia, covering a large portion of Virginia.

The truck's total weight is considered, along with truck length and number of axles. The more weight that sits on a tire the harder it is on the road. After the truck is pulled, the scales are placed on the ground before the wheels. The trucker then drives the truck onto the scales. The weight is computed and placed in a computer by Pulley and it turns out Vann's truck is 2,300 pounds overweight.

"I knew I'd be over...we're trying to make a living...it's a matter of making money, rather than being worried about how much we're carrying," Vann said.

Vann's mistake was that he carried too much weight on the interstate which has lower weight restrictions. The citation is only \$136, but the critical fine is "Time". Vann lost an hour in the stop, and time is money. He will probably drop off one less load, ultimately making less money.

"By us being out here, sometimes it's a deterrent. They know we're out here and they start cutting back on the load weight," Pulley explained to WAVY.com. Curtis Pulley thinks he's making a difference, but is he? Through no fault of his own, 10 On your Side asked to see the area he covers. It's huge. It stretches from the Eastern Shore to Toana west, then halfway across Virginia down to the North Carolina line. Budget constraints require him to cover the entire area. During the month of February, Pulley was on 64 near 264 on February 3 and February 17. Pulley was only in Hampton and Newport News on February 10.

This is critical because the mobile scales deter bypassing the permanent scales like the Weigh Station in Suffolk.

Here's the problem with that. On a Sunny afternoon the scales were closed. Trucks were zooming by getting a free pass.

When WAVY.com showed up at the scale, DMV immediately opened them, and trucker Tom Hanlon was pulled. We asked him why weight matters. Hanlon told him, "So we don't tear up the roads."

The mobile and permanent scales are vital for cutting down wear and tare on the roads-especially with state budget cuts for transportation. It can be argued the one mobile unit for this entire region is stretched way too thin for efficiency.

When we asked Greg with the DMV at the scales why the scales were closed when we first showed up he said, "Let's put it this way, I know the answers, but I'm not going to answer it until I get the okay from Richmond. Turn off that camera."

We then asked Greg if he preferred we leave the property and he said, "I'd rather you do."

The DMV later told us the scales will close down if the trucks are backing up on the road. The only problem with that, there were no trucks backing up when we first showed up at the scale sign that said the scales were closed.

Willie Vann put it this way, "Buddy, it's like this. Everybody out here is trying to make a living. Everybody is heavy weight. I ain't the only one, so S*** happens. That's all I can tell you."