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THE ROAD TO CERTIFICATION

Participants in the Certified Cold Carrier pilot
program share their experiences.

COVER
STORY





(Photo courtesy of WEL Companies.)

THE ROAD TO CERTIFICATION

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In an effort to assist carriers to conform to the Sanitary Transportation of Human and Animal Food rule, part of the implementation of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), the board of directors of the International Refrigerated Transportation Association approved the development of a Certified Cold Carrier in June 2018.

The Certified Cold Carrier is organized by the Global Cold Chain Alliance and based upon the IRTA Refrigerated Transportation Best Practices Guide. (See “Certified Cold,” Cold Facts, May-June 2019.)

The board also approved the implementation of a pilot program made up of seven companies including Midwest Refrigerated Services, Inc.; FFE Transportation Services, Inc.; Great Plains Transport; KeHE Distribu-

tors; Trailer Corp.; WEL Companies and J.B. Hunt. The participating carriers provided vital feedback on the process as well as the relevance and practicality of the Certified Cold Carrier program requirements. Several of the pilot program participants discussed the certification experience during a panel discussion at the launch of the Certified Cold Carrier program at the Global Cold Chain Expo in June 2019. Moderating that panel discussion was Don Durm, Vice President at PLM Trailer Leasing and IRTA Board and Certified Cold Carrier Task Force member.

“Basically, the Certified Cold Carrier process employs the GCCA Best Practices Guide as a road map to best practices allowing participating carriers to do a gap analysis or

mini-audit of their FSMA compliance,” Durm says. “Once certified, Certified Cold Carrier program gives trucking companies confidence about compliance – they know they’ve got it down.”

Here’s what Certified Cold Carrier pilot program participants have to say about their certification experience.

Motivated to Certify

Tom Hardin, Corporate Equipment Manager with KeHE Distributor says, “What motivated us to become certified was that we wanted validation that our internal documentation and processes met and exceeded the stringent guidelines for best practices set by GCCA.”

Durm notes that Certified Cold Carrier program is an enormously helpful process in ensuring that all the documentation needed for compliance is in order. “FSMA compliance requires accurate record keeping and consistency across all the networks of facilities a trucking company might operate. For instance, training records for every facility have to include date of training, driver names, type of training – certification challenges operators to have source records and just as important, know where they are located.”

Durm adds that in the case of training, certification not only helps companies with training recordkeeping, it also helps carriers understand what kind of training is required to be compliant.

Food safety training was a motivator for Dalton Tielens, Co-Owner and Director of National Operations Sales for WEL Companies. “With all the recent news of foodborne illnesses, FSMA was top of mind for us,” Tielens admits. “We do LTL, warehousing and truckload – all three classes – so we felt we better get on board early with the Certified Cold Carrier program. It dovetailed perfectly with our training, procedures and protocols best practices in all three areas. It was a great training tool and a good way to get our people on board.”

For Travis McCain, Vice President of Sales for FFE Transportation Services, Inc., the Certified Cold Carrier pilot program was a good opportunity to align with best practices in refrigerated transportation. “From our company’s perspective, it was a natural. We are very serious about FSMA compliance and we



Since certification, WEL Companies safety and HR departments meet with drivers to check the integrity of equipment and product temperatures and what information is going into the system. (Photo courtesy of WEL Companies.)



FFE refrigerated trailers at the loading dock. (Photo courtesy of FFE Transportation Services, Inc.)



From the Midwest Refrigerated Services fleet. (Photo courtesy of Midwest Refrigerated Services, Inc.)

see this as another technological investment in best practices.”

“The value in the Certified Cold Carrier program for us is two-fold,” notes Jim Koeble, Vice President - Transportation for Midwest Refrigerated Services, Inc. “Internally, it invites review of best practices and creates an opportunity to re-engage drivers and staff on critical temperature control processes. Externally, it differentiates us from other carriers by demonstrating that our cold chain practices relative to the safe transportation of food are verified by a third party so that customers can have confidence in entrusting their refrigerated and frozen shipments to us.”

Koeble adds that major food processors often require third-party quality certifications from their suppliers, and the Certified Cold Carrier provides a mechanism to extend certification

into their critical role for their customers in the cold chain.

“Food manufacturers and processors utilize the services of auditing bodies like BRC and SQF to validate their standards and processes to their customers,” Durm says. “Customers don’t want to know how the sausage is made, they want to ensure that you are achieving the highest industry standards.”

Durm points out that FMSA rules have changed the game for carriers as every time someone arranges for the movement of a food load, they become the shipper with all of the responsibilities under the rules. “Certification gives your customer peace of mind that their carrier is doing the right thing, ascribing to a high standard and following best practices adopted around the world. That’s appealing.”

The Process

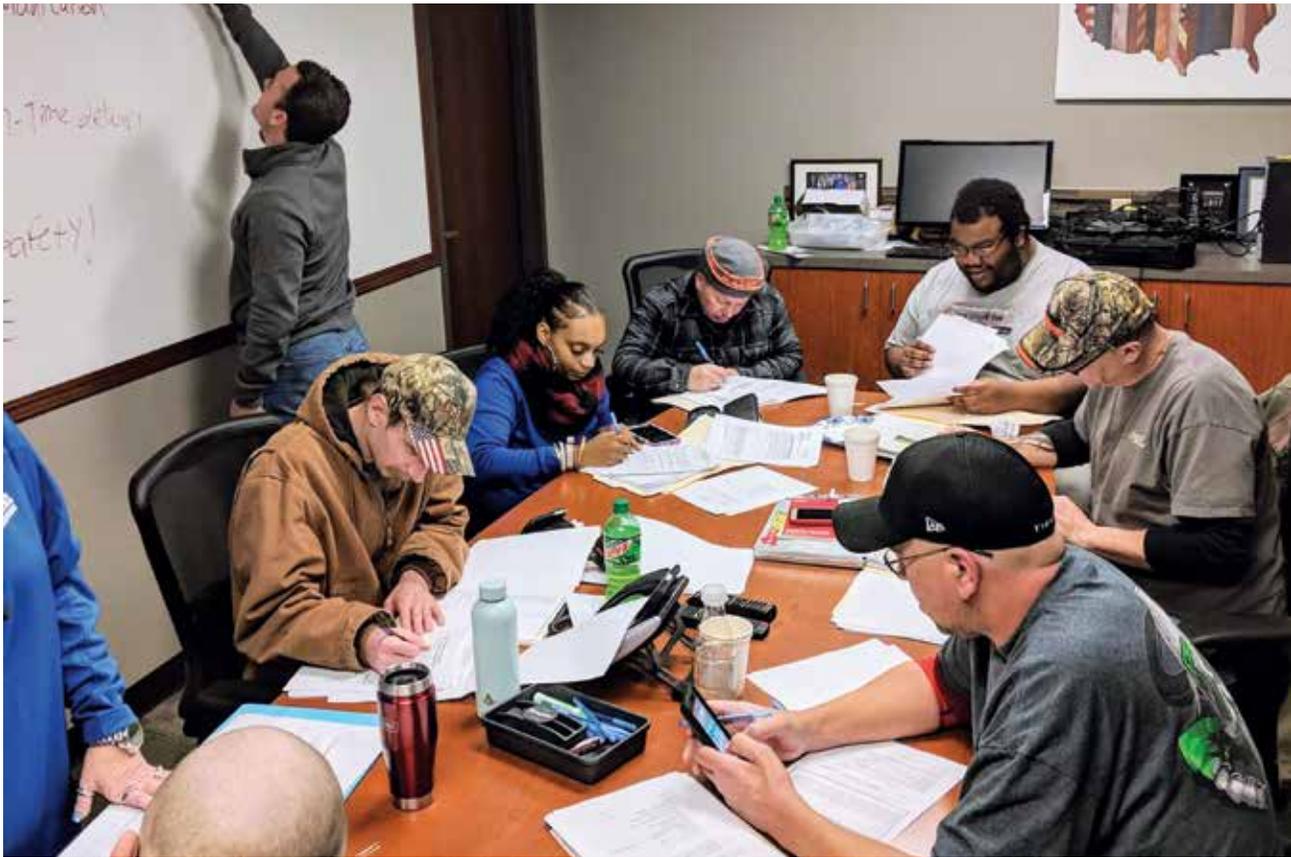
In reference to the Certified Cold Carrier application process, McCain says it was very straightforward. “We have a lot of familiarity with these types of certifications as we are also a dedicated hauler of bio pharma products. That requires stringent audits multiple times a year with customers’ quality assurance teams.”

Lee Neal, Vice President of Business Development for Great Plains Transport, Inc., says the application process was not hard at all. “There were some gray areas in how we should answer a question but Jeff Greenwald, the GCCA’s Manager of Credentialing Programs was always available to provide support, answer our questions and give guidance on the application process. He reviewed our QA manual, that’s our training tool, and saw how

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That’s appealing.”

—DON DURM, Vice President at PLM Trailer Leasing



The first training class conducted by Great Plains Transport where the Certified Cold Carrier Standard Operating Procedure is added to the driver training program. (Photo courtesy of Great Plains Transport, Inc.)

we had adapted it to include Certified Cold Carrier requirements.

Neal adds that the compliance experience also was not hard. “If you’re a refrigerated carrier and doing due diligence as you should be, you should have everything on the list in place already. And if you don’t, you should rethink your operations.”

“The experience was painless and even I learned some new things and I’ve been doing this for 35 years,” Neal notes. “It’s a tremendous opportunity for any carrier and the ROI is twofold.”

The Differentiator

Durm contends that from the shipper’s perspective, all things being equal, they’ll pay a little more because their carrier is doing everything right. And that is a powerful marketing position to be in.

“This, boys and girls, is just the next step,” Durm contends. “From a marketing standpoint, you want to differentiate yourself from the competition. It’s been all about price, but now, certification is a distinguishing factor for a carrier. Even if you have telematics and the newest equipment, this becomes one more way to stand out but in a more critical way because you’re differentiating yourself against an industry standard.”

“Honestly, as the Certified Cold Carrier program gets promoted and word spreads in the industry and more carriers become certified, and shippers and customers realize they can use a certified carrier, it’s going to give those who are certified an advantage over those who are not,” admits Neal. “I’ve

already been on the phone with half our customers to let them know we’re certified and the feedback I’m getting is that it’s a very good step to take and something they plan to use in their own sales and marketing efforts with their own retail to middle-mile customers.”



(Photo courtesy of Great Plains Transport, Inc.)

“We look at our Certified Cold Carrier designation as a differentiator,” Harden says. “At KeHE, products live at the top of the food chain, backed by the best processes and most experienced people in the industry and this designation validates, from an independent third party, what KeHE does every day.”

Onboarding Drivers

Durm says drivers want to work for a company with high standards. “The driver is the customer in a sense – the person that is there every day and has to deal with getting product into the facility. They want to do the right thing and the right thing in this case is the highest standards.”

“KeHE is a company of employee-owners who make a conscious choice to serve in order to make lives better,” Harden explains. “Certification will be part of the internal messaging to our company drivers but also to our warehouse employees that load the trailers. To be recognized by GCCA on our high standards and operational business practices gives employees confidence in our processes and documentation.”

McCain notes that at his company, they have started to provide background on the Certified Cold Carrier on the company’s weekly drivers’ call and to incorporate

“We see this as a very big deal and we’ll certainly use our certification status in recruiting – anything you can do that sets you apart from the other haulers. It shows we take our work and our drivers very seriously, above and beyond sign-on bonuses.”

—TRAVIS MCCAIN,
Vice President of Sales for FFE
Transportation Services, Inc.

Certified Cold Carrier protocols into quarterly training for their drivers and into the company’s quarterly messages.

“We see this as a very big deal and we’ll certainly use our certification status in recruiting – anything you can do that sets you apart from the other haulers,” McCain says. “It shows we take our work and our drivers very seriously, above and beyond sign-on bonuses. Most drivers care about company culture and what the company invests in their drivers and other employees. It’s tremendous for us to be able to say we took the time to certify ourselves – it’s a game changer.”

At Midwest Refrigerated Services, documented best practices are incorporated into new driver orientation and become topics for refresher training and regular driver meetings. “We plan to celebrate the awarding of our certification with our drivers and staff, which will bring further focus,” Koeble says.

Better for It

“We are absolutely a better company for going through the Certified Cold Carrier process,” Koeble says. “While we were following the GCCA Best Practices Guide, we found that not all of those practices were adequately documented in policy or procedure. Going



From the Trailiner Fleet. (Photo courtesy of Trailiner Corporation.)

through the application process helped us tighten that up and also helped ensure that all areas of the company were aligned around the Best Practices Guide.”

Tielens says that after his company gathered all their SOPs and documentation for the Certified Cold Carrier application, new employees started going through training now adapted to the certification process. They also developed their own test to gauge how well new employees comprehended the training and plan to incorporate the new adapted training into quarterly reviews.

“Since certification, our safety and HR departments hold meetings with shipping and receiving and the drivers to check the integrity of equipment and product temperatures and what information is going into the system - all aspects of certification,” Tielens says. “It’s allowed us to tie everything together. Each different practice area has a role in the chain and CCC ensures they understand that role.”

“It’s one thing for us in the head office to talk about best practices but on the ground, certification has changed the way our team handles operations. Teams have to be accountable around the certification process and we’ve had less claims and less claims lead to happier customers and more positive feedback,” McCain admits. “If we continue to drive that home around more SOPs, I have no doubt we’ll see improvements in other areas. It’s extremely important to our customers, but also internally, we’ve developed more awareness and it’s had a positive impact on our bottom line.”

“Companies can become echo chambers,” Durm sums up. “You think you’re doing the right thing but the whole Certified Cold Carrier walk-through gives you the ability to see things you didn’t see before and to have compliance.”

Industry Impact

“With FSMA and the industry changing as rapidly as it has over the past five years, and the constant checking and updating that requires, it’s great to have a source for good information. Being certified – now that’s something you can hang your hat on,” says Josh Whitener, Co-owner of the Trailiner Corporation.

Koeble believes the Certified Cold Carrier will standardize processes and the expectations of all stakeholders relative to the safe refrigerated transportation of food.

“GCCA has this broad worldwide audience, and we could not align with a better partner,” McCain says. “The Certified Cold Carrier runs parallel with the GCCA’s mandate to keep food safe and protect the population and that’s why we’re participating. We take that mandate as seriously as GCCA does and we take pride in establishing a best in class food safety handling program.”

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