

IT PAYS TO ASK ABOUT DRIVER PAY

If you engage dodgy contractors, you're responsible, says Truck Moves Australia director Matt Whitnall

There's plenty of evidence that certain operators in the truck moving industry are guilty of serious wage theft. These on-going breaches also fall within the definition of Modern Slavery under the regulatory guidelines.

So who exactly is responsible? Firstly, of course, it's the operators who are not paying drivers correctly and fairly. It's been three years since the Road Transport & Distribution Award took effect, so there is no excuse for non-compliance. I'm hearing of cases of drivers being paid less than half of the Award rate, and in some cases up to 75 per cent less.

Secondly, and this is important, companies and individuals who engage unscrupulous operators are also in the line of fire for these dodgy practices. Chain of Responsibility (COR) legislation administered by the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (NHVR) was amended in late 2018 to ensure everyone in the supply chain shares responsibility for breaches of the law.

Think about that for a minute. By engaging a truck mover to undertake the straight-forward task of moving one of your trucks from point A to point B, you are responsible for everything they do along the way. This includes complying with road safety rules, but also the fair treatment of drivers and sub-contractors under the Award.

That really should make everyone who contracts third parties to move trucks around Australia sit up and take notice. There's nowhere to hide anymore, no ability to say "I didn't know what they were doing".

You may wonder how customers can possibly be aware of what goes on behind the scenes, when the work undertaken is often on the other side of the country. There's a few tell-tale signs you can look out for.

If you received a couple of quotes for a truck move, and one was noticeably cheaper, that's a warning sign right there. Maybe you received a quote where there was no extra charge for work on weekends or public holidays. In all these cases, wage theft is the only explanation. The bulk of the cost of a move is labour, so if it's cheap it's highly likely that drivers are not being paid correctly.

Or maybe trucks are arriving very quickly from interstate, whether you requested urgency or not. Do the figures and work out how it was possible. Realistically the only way to achieve this is to break the law at serious risk to other road users.

It's your responsibility to look for red flags and ask hard questions. If it seems too good to be true, it probably is.

There are other things customers should do to make sure the companies they engage to move trucks are doing the right thing. Request a supplier audit to check logbooks and driver pay records. You can also ask for a written undertaking from the directors of the company that they are paying drivers correctly per the Award. Responsible operators won't hesitate to open their books, and if you don't get swift agreement you should end all dealings with that business.

It's time for the entire industry, right up to the companies and people engaging truck movers, to act to stop blatant wage theft and unsafe work practices. Not only is it the right thing to do, but under COR laws, everyone in the supply chain is responsible.

Is saving a few dollars and turning a blind eye to dodgy practices really worth the risk to your business and reputation? Not only that, but you could also be held personally liable for non-compliance by the companies you engage to move trucks. Why risk all that for some crook?

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