



A DIVISION OF
ROBERTSON RYAN
& ASSOCIATES

Article 3 – In-Cab Camera



When Todd Menzel from Prairieland Towing decided to add in-cab video monitoring systems to his fleet of over 100 tow trucks, he did not get an enthusiastic response from his team of over 100 employees. The decision, which involved a huge commitment in both time and money, was due in part to his growth, his concern for his driver's safety and the safety of others on the road, and his need to see how his employees were doing on the road.

When you have over 100 employees driving 24/7 performing roadside assistance, impounding vehicles for the county, or pulling large tractor-trailer rigs off the road, you fear for their safety. Todd needed a way to see what their drivers were doing on the road, how they were doing it, and reward what they were doing right while looking for ways to improve overall safety.

"The camera's allow me to be with them at all times, to ensure they are living up to the Prairieland commitment to our S.T.A.R.S. program", says owner Todd Menzel. By definition, the **S.T.A.R.S.** program is: **S-Statewide / T-Traffic / A-Assist / R-Roadside / S-Services.**

*"Our **S.T.A.R.S.** program is intended to assist the motoring public, with the emphasis on Safety and World Class Customer Service that exceeds expectations in which we can boldly pronounce the best safety service patrol program in the U.S. Menzel Enterprise's culture is more than a job, it is a lifestyle that emphasizes our motto, 'Saving lives is not ONLY what we do, it's who we are'. Our **STARS** understand and own the mission that entails assisting stranded motorists in all capacities. No longer are they just simply a driver or operator, their mission is to aid all those whom they encounter on the highway thus saving a potential life with every encounter. Our logo states it plainly **S.T.A.R.S.** - our actions live up to our logo and more. We proudly present our **S.T.A.R.S.** to the motoring public and commit to the excellence that is Menzel Enterprises".*

Camera systems are not cheap, and can range from \$4000-\$10,000 per unit, depending on functionality. Todd's units have 8 cameras and provide a 360 degree birds eye view, all the while storing up to 8 hours of video that eventually gets backed up to a hard drive in the office. The camera systems provide GPS, contain a black box which backs up every minute, cameras that update every 5 seconds, provides a back-up cell phone and texting device, and the ability to communicate live with the home office.

Of course when Todd originally introduced the in-cab video system, it was a big change for his drivers and not everyone was on-board. His employees were originally offended by the "big-brother" monitoring, didn't understand or agree with the motive or the outcome. But after a while, the cameras

paid off and all the employees realized it was more about **their** overall safety and protection than it was about any big-brother monitoring.



It only takes one incident where a driver is wrongly accused of damaging a vehicle or fender, or accusations of inappropriate behavior, or of having caused an accident, to realize the value of having his actions all on tape. Sometimes incidents get skewed when emotions are running high and emergency situations prevail. The driver might say what he thinks happened, while the customer will say what they think happened. The cameras show what actually happened so take much of the fact finding out of the equation.

The videos are also used as learning tools. They help to educate drivers and help to make their drivers safer. They help management see which employees are not living up to the **S.T.A.R.S.** program, and help train and educate them while also providing documentation if further action is necessary. “That video showing too sharp a turn, or inattentive driving, or improper loading of a vehicle can provide valuable training for our drivers, but again, catching them doing something right is our favored teaching approach”, says Todd.



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Todd also likes to be in touch both visually and verbally with his drivers, to see that they are okay and to monitor emergency situations they are pulling up to. Part of their services include government contracting/impounding vehicles that are illegally parked or repossessions, so having the live-stream video cameras on at all times can also help diffuse an unsafe situation for the driver. In addition the office can monitor all cameras and also take over the zoom and tilt of each camera while the driver is out of the car. Each cab is also equipped with a panic button that is directly linked to their 24/7 dispatch who can contact local law enforcement should the situation become unsafe.

In fact, Prairieland has often partnered with law enforcement and emergency personnel responding to roadside accidents. They help provide a private piece to a very public service. They have gained a mutual respect for each other on the road, helping each other by sharing their cameras and video capability should they be called upon to respond to police situations.

“We’ve had the cameras for about 4-5 years now, and they have more than paid for themselves just in the refuted claims alone”. Todd has no reservations about installing them, and considers them a necessity for doing business. “We are a world class towing company that has our driver’s safety and that of our customers as our number one priority”.

Todd Menzel’s parents started Prairieland Towing back in 1984. When Todd’s dad passed away at a young age, Todd and his brother Tim stepped in to help his mom Jeanne keep the business going. Jeanne drove the truck, while Todd and Tim loaded/unloaded the vehicles. Today Prairieland is the largest towing operation in Wisconsin, and one of the largest in the country. They service SE WI with offices in Milwaukee and Madison, and also have 2 out of state locations in Iowa and Florida. Their services include at-home battery service all the way to 75 ton tractor trailer recovery and government contracts. For more info, visit <http://www.plt-wi.com/index.html> or call 1-877-4-TOW-NOW.

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