

FEATURE

Snow removal:

Easy as 1-2-3



1 Before leaving the yard, drivers pull up alongside the snow removal trailer, leaving enough space between the trailers to allow snow to escape. Previously, they had to pull into the wash bay for snow and ice removal, which was time-consuming, required the help of a second person and cluttered the wash bay with snow and ice.



3 Drivers can now safely remove snow and ice from atop their trailer. It takes about 15 minutes to remove snow and up to a half-hour if ice is present. Drivers use a highly specialized piece of equipment for this task: A piece of hockey board attached to the end of a stick. What could be more Canadian than that?

By James Menzies

BADEN, Ont. – What to do with snow and ice that's accumulated on trailer tops has been a quandary since, well, since folks began hauling freight in van trailers.

The issue has received more attention lately, however, thanks to new legislation in New Jersey that requires drivers to make a "reasonable effort" to remove snow and ice from the roofs of their trailers or face hefty fines.

There are several snow removal systems on the market, some more effective – not to mention cost-effective – than others. However, the Erb Group of Companies has come up with a system of its own that provides drivers with a safe and easy way to clear off their equipment while also finding a secondary use for decommissioned reefer trailers.

Tom Boehler, director of safety and compliance with Erb Group, said the idea stemmed from a prototype system that was built at the company's Ottawa terminal, but with the catwalk affixed to the outside of

the trailer. To avoid a litany of fall protection requirements, the company's health and safety committee teamed with a local machine shop to fine-tune the system to make it safer and to save drivers the hassle of wearing harnesses. The result is a system that works pretty well. So well, in fact, all nine of Erb's Canadian terminals now have a system of their own.

The system begins with a good reefer trailer, Boehler explained during a recent tour.

"This trailer was about seven years old," he said. "It still has valid inspection stickers. Over the years, these trailers gain weight in the walls from moisture and start costing a lot of money to maintain, so we were going to decommission these trailers. But they are still roadwor-

2 Drivers climb the stairs, fabricated by Cress-Ridge Machine, up to the catwalk that's strategically located within the trailer's walls to avoid the need for fall protection equipment.

thy and can still be annually inspected and certified if you wanted to move it to a customer's to clean trailers there."

Reefers are ideal because they have strong floor, roof and wall structures. Cress-Ridge Machine out of nearby New Hamburg provided the fabrication of the steps and crossbeams, at a cost of a little under \$9,000. Add the value of the trailer, and each system costs about \$12,000, Boehler said. Cleaning a trailer can take anywhere from 15 minutes for light snow to up to half an hour if ice is present. Drivers are paid for their time and seem to appreciate having the system available.

"I think most of them are glad there's something there and they don't have to rely on the wash bay

being open and someone coming in to do it (for them)," Boehler said. "It's something that's easily-accessible to them and there's no tie-down required."

As shippers have learned about the system, some have asked the company for a price on getting a similar snow removal system for their own facilities. With more trailers nearing the end of their freight hauling days, it could mean that Erb has stumbled upon a lucrative side business.

"We've had some of our shippers enquire about purchasing trailers through us and setting up the fabrication. I haven't heard whether they're going ahead with it or not but we do have some trailers that are going to be decommissioned so the opportunity is there," he said. □

