

## The Story and Lessons from this Mobile Cache Support Van Driving Incident

By Salvador E. Gamez



On March 18 at approximately 1410 hours, I completed the unloading process at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) excess property off-site warehouse just east of the NIFC campus in Boise. I returned the tractor-trailer vehicle's cab and carefully drove away from the loading dock.

Once parked away from the loading dock, I exited and secured both trailer doors before reentering the cab and heading back to NIFC along the designated route—in which I crossed over four sets of railroad tracks. Upon arrival at the NIFC main gate entrance, I noticed that cones were blocking the truck entrance.

I therefore stopped at the security gate and waited for instructions. The security guard directed me to use the regular vehicle entrance.

Navigating through that entryway, I saw no posted height or width measurements. Because I hadn't driven a tractor-trailer through that gate before, I proceeded with extra caution. My attention was divided as I checked to ensure that the trailer wasn't hitting the awning over the security checkpoint or brushing against the sides of the entrance.

After stopping for an ID check, as I continued forward, I soon heard a noise coming from the rear of the vehicle. Investigating, I found the right rear door was open and its bottom left corner was damaged. The bottom left corner was bent up and outward with scratches to the door. I inspected the trailer for any additional damage and secured the door as best I could.



***Three images depicting damage to the lower left corner of the right trailer door.***

Upon further examination, I discovered that as I had driven through NIFC's security gate, this open door had struck a pole which supports signage at NIFC's security building's entrance. Both the signs and the pole received scrape marks and were slightly bent. I then proceeded to the warehouse, docked the trailer, and documented the damage accordingly.



***Left – The approach to the NIFC security entrance, with the awning and narrow entrance shown. The post that was struck is boxed in red. Middle – A closer image of the damage to the signs. Right – Where the sign was cut by the open trailer door.***

## **Lessons**

After reviewing the situation, it's clear that a few simple steps could have helped prevent this from happening—or happening again.

First, when conducting the walk-around inspection before leaving, I should always make sure that the trailer is equipped with a locking device on the doorlatch and that the door is properly seated and secured. Ensuring the doors are seated and latched with a locking device will ensure that any jarring from the road or crossing railroad tracks would prevent doors from unlatching. This will greatly reduce the risk of accidental openings.

Additionally, while driving, it's important to thoroughly check your mirrors, especially in areas where space is tight or entryways have limited height.

Taking a little extra time to double-check these details can make a significant difference. Ensuring the proper height and width of an entryway—prior to moving forward—should be a priority to mitigate any damage occurring to both vehicles and infrastructure.

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