

Oh Canada!

Earlier this year, I was invited to attend the annual conference of Trucking HR Canada in Toronto. I must say it was well worth the long flight!

Trucking HR Canada leads collaboration among the Canadian trucking industry on issues of human resources, careers, best practice, and recruitment. As these are all big issues here in New Zealand, it was interesting and informative to hear about the challenges the industry faces in Canada.

As part of the conference, I was pleased to contribute to an international panel with representatives from Norway, Denmark, the UK, and Australia. I spoke to the delegates about WIRT and what we are doing to promote industry career paths for women in our neck of the woods.

Before the conference started, a group of us were lucky enough to be taken to have a look around Challenger Motor Freight and Bison Freight, two large transport companies in Toronto. There were some noticeable differences from how we do things in New Zealand, particularly around the professional development of their staff.

The first thing you notice is that trucks in Canada look dirty, rusty, and uncared for. This is easy to explain as the salt that is spread on the ice and snow quickly corrodes shiny wheel rims and paint jobs. Because of their proximity to the United States, their truck configuration matches US regulations—mostly 18 wheelers with a 'dry box' of 53 feet long. Bison Freight also had drag saving wings on the back of their dry boxes to reduce drag and save fuel.

The Bison workshop was impressive. The manager even wears a suit and tie! They have 12 bays with two free at one end. Beyond the 12-bay workshop was a full truck and trailer wash, fully enclosed, again designed for Canada's harsh cold conditions. It was manned to keep the facility clean and tidy and do the wash while the driver relaxed in the driver's lounge or took part in training.

Bison has invested in catalytic filter cleaners for emissions control. This process takes four hours. While this is happening, the tractor unit undergoes other servicing and the driver has his or her turn on the computer to upskill or complete annual training modules. Other facilities provided for the staff include a



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full gym room and a driver's lounge with a large screen TV and La-Z-Boy rockers.

Training and updates are required to be undertaken by the drivers annually. If a driver's incidents or fuel numbers come back outside normal operating parameters, he or she is brought in and put through a driving simulator and their driving style is analysed and optimised. One driver had three million miles under his belt and not one incident, accident, or need to come in for retraining. That's impressive.

Fuel figures and empty running was addressed twice a day in dispatch 'huddles'. Twice a day, dispatchers get together and discuss how their day was going and if any figures were outside the operating parameters. If one dispatcher has an issue, it is often solved by the group.

The company looks after their drivers by offering a good hourly rate along with good working conditions and younger vehicles to drive. The drivers do not have uniforms supplied, which was a curious difference compared to here. They could purchase branded clothing if they wished and there seem to be good uptake on that option as there was a real sense of pride in who they worked for.

Overall, the trip was a great experience, and I am honoured to have represented WIRT in Canada. I hope to encourage some of the contacts I have made to come and speak at one of our events in the future. ■



The workshop at Bison Freight