



MOTOR CARRIER **ENFORCEMENT SAFETY** **CORNER**



Engine Retarder Brakes: Pros and Cons

If you've been behind the wheel of a heavy truck for any length of time, you've relied on an engine retarder brake. Whether you're hauling aggregate, equipment, or other heavy loads, it's one of the most valuable tools on the truck.

Unfortunately, when most people hear about engine retarders, the conversation usually starts with complaints about noise. As drivers, you know they're designed for a much more important purpose: helping control heavy vehicles safely while reducing wear on service brakes.

A Tool for Doing the Job Right

A loaded truck carries a tremendous amount of weight. When you're coming down a hill, that weight wants to keep moving. Without an engine retarder, your service brakes have to do all the work. Using a retarder properly helps control speed, reduces brake heat, and lowers the risk of brake fade.

Brake components are expensive, and every use shortens their lifespan. When conditions allow, using the retarder can significantly reduce wear on brakes, lowering maintenance costs and keeping equipment on the road longer. For drivers, that means less downtime and more time getting the job done.

But let's be honest. Some engine retarders can be loud. Most drivers understand why municipalities post "No Engine Brake" signs in residential areas. Residents don't want to hear repeated engine brake noise, especially during the evening or overnight hours.

At the same time, many people don't understand why drivers use them. That can create tension between trucking operations and the communities we work in. Good relationships with those communities matter to your industry.

Safety Comes First

While being considerate is important, safety must always come first. If an engine retarder is needed to safely control a vehicle, drivers should use it. No one should compromise safety simply to avoid making noise.

However the key is good judgment. Consider the location, time of day, traffic, and road conditions. If another safe option exists, use it. If the retarder is needed, use it professionally. It is important to realize that if it's not used appropriately there are potential fines that can be used to address it.

Every truck on the road represents your industry. The actions of one driver can influence how the public views all truck drivers. Most people won't understand the challenges of moving a heavy load safely, but they will remember professionalism, courtesy, and safe driving practices.

The Bottom Line

Engine retarder brakes are an important safety tool. They help control speed, reduce brake wear, lower maintenance costs, and improve safety for everyone on the road. Like any tool, they need to be used with good judgment. Used properly, they demonstrate the skill, professionalism, and experience that define your industry.

And that's something worth making a little noise about.

Stay safe out there!

