

Ultra-fast trailer tracking helps Sunco Carriers keep its cool using TransCore's GlobalWave satellite trailer tracking terminals

At a glance

Sunco Carriers Inc.
Conley, Georgia
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Goal:
Provide a robust, weather-resistant tracking system for more than 600 refrigerated trailers (reefers) with rapid, accurate cargo location in the field

Scope:
100 employees / 425 tractors / 660 trailers
More than 1,500 refrigerator loads per week

Solution:
Install TransCore's GlobalWave satellite trailer tracking system and integrate it with Sunco's existing McLeod TMS installation

Results:

- Dramatically reduced pilferage and theft
- Faster, more accurate load tracking for customers
- 99% uptime on tracking units in the field

"If you can find it in the frozen foods section of the grocery store, especially in the Southeast, it's probably ridden on a Sunco Carriers trailer," said Sunco's Rick Cobb.

Sunco Carriers, Inc. is a regional carrier specializing in transporting refrigerated trailers (reefers) that travel "from Texas to just about all points east," he adds. Cobb, Sunco's regional vice president, says the company's average haul length is about 500 miles.

The company relies on 425 tractors, all provided by owner-operators, to power about 660 Sunco Carriers trailers. Four or five years ago, the company was experiencing trailer theft and pilferage problems.

"There were always some trailers that we couldn't locate. We'd think they were in one

place and in fact they were somewhere else," said Cobb. Sunco was moving more than 1,500 loads per week, primarily refrigerated goods worth anywhere from \$10,000 to \$100,000 per load, and needed a better way to track its cargo in the field.

The company opted to place satellite tracking units on its trailers instead of on the tractor power units. "We don't own the power units, and we were sensitive to the fact that our owner-operators might regard that as invading their privacy," Cobb pointed out.

Yet putting tracking units on refrigerated vans posed several difficulties, he added. "With dry vans, you can put the tracking unit inside the trailer. You can't do that with a reefer; the tracking device can't penetrate the thick insulation and see the satellite."

Sunco integrates trailer tracking into its logistics software

"That means," said Cobb, "that the tracking device must be mounted externally on the trailer, where it's exposed to the elements. Most tracking units aren't built for that."

Sunco worked with TransCore engineers to develop a shielded unit that could withstand the challenging environment of the typical reefer. "It was a great example of a company being willing to listen and collaborate to get us what we needed," said Cobb.

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- Rick Cobb, Sunco Carriers Inc..

Sunco has installed mobile satellite tracking units on more than 600 of its trailers, and is pleased with their reliability in the field. "We have about a 99% response rate from these units, which we consider very reliable," said Cobb.

But the real test of a satellite tracking system is performance, and that's where the TransCore GlobalWave product shines. The tracking system is fully integrated into the company's McLeod logistics software, where it provides operators with regular reports.

"We can see our trailers and know exactly where they are and where they've been. That helps us understand activity and utilization, which makes planning easier," said Cobb.

Once the tracking system was fully operational, Sunco saw a dramatic drop in missing trailers. "If someone misplaces or steals a trailer, we are able to find and recover it. The

way the mapping process works, we can literally send an address to local law enforcement to get our property back."

"It doesn't take long," Cobb added, "for the system to pay for itself when it helps you recover a \$50,000 asset. And people know we have this system, so they're more likely to steal someone else's trailer."

Over time, however, the biggest trailer tracking benefits have come from enhancements to Sunco's customer service.

"We've set the GlobalWave units to respond automatically every four hours, but we can also send out a manual query and get a fix on a load's location in as little as two minutes," said Cobb. That capability lets Sunco provide near-instantaneous response when a customer calls to ask when his load will arrive.

Globalwave's accurate reporting has had other benefits as well. "Our operators can automatically generate a "run-late" report," said Cobb, "Our records can show if the trailer arrived on time, if it was detained longer than contracted for, which helps with detention billing, and it helps us adjust our schedules for future loads."

Sunco's currently considering the purchase of some of the many sensor options also available with the GlobalWave system. "We're investigating the return on adding fuel and box temperature sensors," Cobb said, which would provide the company with a warning system at little or no additional airtime cost.

"All in all," said Cobb, "The GlobalWave system is a very simple, logical, reliable, and economical solution for our problem."