

A visit to the truck control centre at the Gotthard

## The test before the tunnel

Tunnels are traffic bottlenecks and represent a risk to trucks passing through them. After the serious accident at the start of the millennium, a control centre to check the state of the trucks at either end of the Gotthard tunnel was set up. Anitra Green reports.

One thing is certain: nobody ever wants to see a fire again like the one that occurred in the Gotthard road tunnel fourteen years ago, leaving eleven people dead and millions of francs worth of damage. To prevent such a disaster from ever happening again, control centres were established at either end of the Alpine transport bottleneck to check the state of the trucks, their freight and their drivers, and a trickle system was installed to limit access of trucks to and to ensure a lower density of trucks inside the tunnel.

A total of 12,000 to 15,000 trucks a day are checked at the Ripshausen control centre near Erstfeld at the northern end of the 16.9-km tunnel – weight, profile, tyres, lights, brakes, technical de-

fects and, if indicated, a more thorough check-up in the workshop and/or a breath test. To ensure drivers know what it is all about, a flyer is handed out in 25 different languages, including Russian and Chinese, and an interpreter can be provided if necessary.

Up to 100 root-and-branch spot checks are made as well. Overall, approximately 10% of trucks are not allowed to proceed because of technical faults, which the drivers can either have corrected through their own organisation or by a local services provider – a list of local workshops is made available at the centre. The main problems are apparently overweight, excessive height or width, technical defects and problems with tyres or wheels.



Photo: Anitra Green

Not a border but at a tunnel.

The centre is run by the police force of the canton of Uri in Switzerland, who also impose fines when required – though whether they can be fully paid or not is another matter, considering the low wages some truckers get. But the system works: the likelihood of another catastrophic fire is practically nil.

*Anitra Green*