

Stoneridge in Lexington creates auto parts with worldwide demand

Published by Richland Source on September 30, 2021



The semi trucks of the future might just be mirrorless.

Since 2014, Stoneridge Inc. has been replacing commercial truck mirrors with a system of integrated cameras and monitors. The MirrorEye Camera Monitor System eliminates driver blind spots, improves safety and even cuts down on vehicle emissions.

"We basically identified a gap in the industry and designed and manufactured something to "meet that need," said Samantha Simmerson, global marketing and communications coordinator for Stoneridge.

“You remove the external mirrors on the Class Eight vehicle or bus or coach,” she said. “By removing those external mirrors, you can save two to three percent on fuel economy, which is a huge savings when you have hundreds of vehicles in your fleet.”

MirrorEye was originally created for a customer in Europe, where fuel emission regulations are much stricter. But the benefits go far beyond saving a few bucks at the pump.

“If you're sitting at a four-way stop, your mirrors would block about 40 feet in either direction, which can fit about three to four cars, so a driver wouldn't see any of those vehicles,” Simmerson said.

The system consists of five mirrors -- two on the driver's side and three on the passenger side. One camera on the passenger side looks straight down, eliminating a blind spot big enough for an entire car.

When the vehicle is not in use, the cameras fold in and the system sleeps in order to save battery life.

Removing mirrors from a commercial vehicle is illegal in the U.S.; however, Stoneridge obtained an exemption from the Department of Transportation that allows the company to retrofit client vehicles with the MirrorEye system.

Today, the MirrorEye has been installed on 26 fleets in North America, meaning about 350 to 400 vehicles use the system.

Mario Gafencu has been driving commercial vehicles for more than 21 years. He's driven more than 2.5 million safe miles in his career.

That's about 431 round trips from New York to San Francisco.

“I wish all my miles would have been with the MirrorEye, it would have been a lot easier,” he said.

Gafencu said it took him about a week to get used to the MirrorEye system after joining the Stoneridge team in 2020. The screens are mounted in a similar line of sight to the mirrors, but closer.

He believes MirrorEye is safer than a traditional system because drivers don't have to crane their necks to see what's around them.

“We're reducing the amount of time that the driver has to take his eyes off the road,” he explained.

Gafencu said the mirrors deliver clear, crisp images -- even at night and in bad weather.

“MirrorEye lenses are designed with a hydrophobic coating that repels moisture and dust,” Simmerson explained. “Our test drivers are reporting that they are doing less work because they’re not having to clean the lens as opposed to the regular cleaning of mirrors.”

The system can also reduce fatigue, since drivers don’t have to crane their necks to look around during traffic stops.

When drivers are safer, companies save on insurance and repair costs. But Gafencu believes the new system will also help appeal to the next generation of drivers.

“The average age of a truck driver right now is right about 60 years old,” he said. “The new younger drivers are coming in, they like technology and anything to help them be safer on the road.”

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of the role truck drivers play in the economy. Stoneridge believes systems like MirrorEye can help improve retention by making drivers’ jobs easier and safer.

MirrorEye may be the most well-known Stoneridge product, but it’s far from the only one.

The company designs and manufactures electrical and electronic systems, components and modules around the world. Its diverse customer base includes the buyers in the automotive, commercial vehicle, motorcycle, agricultural and off-highway vehicle industries.

Stoneridge was founded in Warren, Ohio in 1965. Today, it's a global company with locations in Europe, China, India, Brazil and North America.

The Lexington location, formerly High Stat Manufacturing, employs 580 workers. The branch focuses primarily on electronic and mechanical components for the automotive industry. There are more than 60 molding presses in the facility, Engineering Manager Ben Harriger said.

Some of Stoneridge’s products are made-to-order based on a client’s specifications. The company makes more than 140 varieties of exhaust gas temperature sensors, which helps with fuel economy in diesel exhaust systems.

Another example is seat track sensors, which connect to a vehicle’s air bag. These sensors control the level of force from an airbag based on the location of the driver and passenger chairs.

“We want to make sure that the airbag deploys at the right capacity to keep the driver and passenger protected,” Simmerson said. “So say for example you're really close to the steering wheel. It'll only deploy to what it needs to so that you're not injured.”

https://www.richlandsource.com/business/stoneridge-in-lexington-creates-auto-parts-with-worldwide-demand/article_296ac79c-1fb4-11ec-8404-cfe03eb3f494.html