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Tractor Trailer Truck Driver Fatigue

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How current an issue is tractor trailer truck driver fatigue?

Truck driver fatigue is a very current issue and has been the subject of recent regulatory activity. Truck driver fatigue is the subject of new regulations issued by the USDOT (U.S. Department of Transportation) through the FMCSA branch, which handles motor carrier (trucking) issues . Pursuant to these rules, a tractor trailer truck driver may only drive 11 hours after 10 consecutive hours off. In addition, in order to prevent driver fatiugue, a tractor trailer truck driver may not drive more than 60 hours in any seven day period. If a driver takes 2.5 days off, he can clean his consecutive hours slate and start at 0 again.

Why not require even stricter time limits to prevent driver fatigue?

Another factor in preventing accidents is driver experience. If stricter guidelines were put in place immediately, there would be an insufficient number of experienced drivers. Thus, while decreasing the number of accidents caused by tractor trailer truck driver fatigue, we would see an offset and even increase in total accidents due to those accidents caused by truck driver inexperience.

Are all hours logged, or just driving hours?

The Truckload Carriers Association has stated that drivers "understate their non-driving hours in their log books" and that to improve sales, companies expect their drivers to "wait, unload, and load at the shipper's warehouses at no cost to the shipper" and only then, begin logging time for their 11 hours. This may increase the actual work hours by 50%, thus significantly increases the risk of truck driver fatigue.

How common is tractor trailer driver fatiuge in causing accidents?

The NTSB (National Transportation Safety Board) estimates that truck driver fatigue (lack of sleep, overwork) may be a factor in over a third of all large (semi, 18 wheeler) truck accidents. Further, the NTSB found that truck driver fatigue was the most likley

cause in over 30% of crashes that were fatal to the fatigued truck driver.

How common is it for a truck driver to fall asleep at the wheel?

In the Journal of Public Health Policy, in 1992, a report showed that 1 in 5 truck drivers had been so fatigued that they had fallen asleep at the wheel.

What is truck driver fatigue?

Fatigue is a broad term and includes being "sleepy", "tired" or "exhausted". This applies not only to the performance of physical activity, but to mental activity as well. Thus, the decision making capabilities of a truck driver can be impaired along with coordination. Fatigue can severely impair judgment. In addition, the more tired you become, the less likely you will be to recognize that you are tired.

What are the warning signs of truck driver fatigue?

yawning

lack of concentration

red eyes

anxiousness

restlessness

drowsiness

impaired reaction time

attention deficit

irritability

large steering corrections

missing road signs

lane drift

What are the high risk times for truck driver fatigue-related fatal crashes?

Studies show that fatal fatigue-related accidents tend to occur between 10pm-6am (during normal human sleep hours), and 1pm-3pm (after a heavy lunch). These times of the day coincide with dips in the body's circadian rhythms, and with drops in blood sugar, which are part of the human makeup.

Will these new regulations cut down on fatal crashes due to truck driver fatigue?

The FMCSA estimates that 75 lives will be saved each year and 1,326 fatigue-related tractor-trailer truck accidents will be prevented annually.

Tractor Trailer Underride Accidents.

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What is a Tractor Trailer Underride Accident?

Tractor-Trailer underride accidents occur when a passenger vehicle, usually the front of the passenger vehicle, enters below the base of the trailer of a large truck (e.g., 18-wheeler). This is particularly possible with small family passenger cars (as opposed to a mini-van or SUV). Unfortunately, the height of the front of the car is insufficient to contact the bed of the truck, often 10 to 20 inches below the bed of the truck. This puts the bed of the truck right at the head-chest level of the passengers within the car. Injuries in these accidents tend to be catastrophic, if not fatal.

Why doesn't the driver just slow down to prevent an underride accident?

A tractor-trailer truck is pretty big... so why doesn't the car driver see the tractor trailer in time to prevent a underride accident?

Unfortunately, perception and reality meet too late in these circumstances. Often the driver is fooled into thinking that the roadway is clear. Simply, the passenger car driver does not have adequate warning of the impending trailer underride danger.

What is being done to improve driver perception or trailer safety?

Since 1993, trucks must have a special type of reflective tape on the rear and sides of the trailer. Since 1996, trucks must also be equipped with a rear underride guard (strong metal structure) at a height of 22 inches above the ground, so that it will easily come in contact with the engine block of a small car, and thus prevent the car from underriding the bed of the tractor truck trailer. However, it is sad news that many trucks have not been retrofitted. Thus, many tractor trailer trucks manufactured before 1996 are on the road without these two critical safety features. In addition, even ones that have had these features installed may have insufficient protective qualities, such as an inadequate amount of reflective material or a rear underride guard that is too weak to prevent underride of the passenger vehicle.

What are other factors that play into a rear underride accident

Weather. Especially fog, snow, or rain that reduces the distance of visibility. Fog and snow are a huge problem, since they often mask the grey or white color of many trucks.

Driver carelessness. If the driver is momentarily inattentive, they may not see a trailer that has been inadequately pulled to the side of the road, or a trailer that is across the highway as the result of a u-turn or a wide turn in the case of a truck entering a

roadway.

The positioning of the truck may cause a trailer underride accident.

Road conditions. Slick road conditions increase the stopping time for a car approaching a tractor trailer underride situation.

Surrounding (ambient) lighting which can reflect off of the truck and cause the truck to blend in with its surrounding, forming a sort of accidental camouflaged, especially on a silver truck. In fact often the reflective red/orange colors match the neon lights from surrounding businesses.

Road lighting. A lack of road lighting can make it very difficult to see the outline of the tractor truck's trailer. Especially a dark colored truck trailer such as a dark blue, brown or black trailer. This makes it nearly impossible for the driver of the passenger car to see the truck in time to stop and prevent a trailer underride.

Dirty tractor trailers cause accidents. When dirt collects on the reflective tape, it becomes inefficient at reflecting light and loses its protective warning qualities. Frequent washing of the truck is a must to give the passenger car driver a chance to prevent a side underride accident with the tractor trailer!

What is the most common danger that creates a Tractor Trailer Underride Accident?

Truck driver making a u-turn or a wide-turn. This is not a sudden u-turn. Rather, this is a situation where often the truck has made it already half way around. In fact, the cab of the truck is often facing the oncoming traffic. That fact makes it even more deceiving to the oncoming traffic, since they believe that the truck is already facing them, with the trailer straight behind it, rather than reality - with the tractor truck's trailer stretched across the oncoming car's path of transit.

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