

Traffic Safety



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FMCSA receives strong feedback to proposed changes for CMV crash records

Charles Donelson was paying attention to the road and obeying the speed limit in his commercial truck early on the morning of Nov. 13, 2015, as he rolled through rural Grand Island, NE.

All of a sudden, an incident occurred with the potential to affect Donelson's finances and career.

"I never saw the deer until I hit it," Donelson wrote in an Aug. 26 letter to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. "[I] never even had a chance to apply my brakes."

The impact destroyed the radiator of Donelson's truck and damaged other parts of the engine. The vehicle lost all of its water and had to be towed for repairs.



To make the situation worse, the incident appeared in Donelson's crash history – a key component of FMCSA's safety ratings for motor carriers and drivers.

"This was an unpreventable accident and yet it is showing up in my 'Crash History,'" Donelson wrote. "I was the only one involved, and it seems I have this report simply due to the fact that I had to be towed. I think this is unfair as it shows nothing about what really happened and could hurt me insurance-wise and also getting freight."

This past summer, FMCSA asked for feedback regarding proposed changes to the way it collects crash data involving commercial motor vehicles. More than 100 individuals and groups responded.

The comments stemmed from FMCSA's announcement on July 12 that it was proposing a trial program that would

exclude non-preventable crashes from motor carriers' safety records. The agency currently includes all crashes – even those in which CMV drivers are not at fault – in its Safety Measurement System data.

Many, such as Donelson, praised the agency for considering a less rigid process but asked for additional considerations to be made regarding motorists who run red lights and hit CMVs, as well as CMV drivers who cannot avoid a collision with an animal. Others pointed out the different ways in which states and law enforcement officers handle crash reports, and asked the agency to push for a universal crash reporting form.

The pilot program would eliminate four crash scenarios involving CMVs from the agency's SMS data. A crash would be considered "not preventable" if a motorist struck a CMV and was convicted of at least one of the following:

- Driving under the influence.
- Driving the wrong direction.
- Striking the CMV in the rear.
- Striking the CMV while it was legally stopped.

Many commenters said FMCSA's proposed pilot program represented a good start. Some said crash histories might continue to be overstated for carriers and CMV drivers because the requirement for another motorist to be cited and convicted of a traffic offense might be difficult to meet. Sometimes, critics said, cases are dismissed on technicalities because a law enforcement officer did not follow proper procedures.

Regardless, the majority of feedback was positive.

"We take pride in maintaining our safety performance and feel this program would ensure a company's crash indicator would be given a truer score," wrote Pam Ruschau, who works for Trans Alliance LLC of Greenville, OH.

NEWS BRIEFS

Proposed rule would place speed limiters on large commercial vehicles

WASHINGTON – The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration have announced a proposed rule that would require the installation of speed-limiting devices on trucks, buses and multipurpose passenger vehicles weighing more than 26,000 pounds.

The proposed rule, announced Aug. 26, suggests that capping speeds at 60, 65 or 68 mph could prevent fatal crashes while saving an estimated \$1.1 billion in fuel costs annually. The maximum set travel speed would be adjusted after officials weigh public comment on the proposal.

“In addition to saving lives, the projected fuel and emissions savings make this proposal a win for safety, energy conservation, and our environment,” Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx said in a press release.

FMCSA Administrator T.F. Scott Darling III and NHTSA Administrator Mark Rosekind also expressed support for the proposal. “Safe trucking moves our economy and safe bus operations transport our loved ones,” Darling said in the DOT press release. “This proposal will save lives while ensuring that our nation’s fleet of large commercial vehicles operates efficiently.”

In a statement issued Aug. 17, Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-GA), a longtime supporter of the proposed rule, cited federal data showing an estimated 1,115 fatal crashes involving large trucks occur every year. “Each day that has passed that this commonsense safety measure has been delayed by bureaucratic processes is one too many,” Isakson said in the statement.

Isakson issued an amendment earlier this year that was included in the Senate-passed transportation funding measure. It required the secretary of transportation to make a final ruling on speed-limiting devices by no later than six months after its potential passage into law.

Read the proposed rule at <http://sb-m.ag/2bTEvv7f>.

Traffic-related deaths increased sharply in 2015: NHTSA

WASHINGTON – A total of 35,092 people died in traffic-related incidents in 2015 – up 7.2 percent from 32,744 the previous year and the largest one-year percentage increase in nearly 50 years, according to data released Aug. 29 by the National Highway Traffic Safety Association.

The data, published in the August issue of “Traffic Safety Facts,” shows that the estimated number of people injured increased to 2.44 million in 2015 from 2.34 million in 2014.

Other findings included in the report:

- Nearly half of the drivers killed were not wearing a seat belt.
- Alcohol-impaired driving deaths rose 3.2 percent to 10,265.
- Distracted driving played a part in about 1 in 10 deaths.
- Pedestrian deaths increased 9.5 percent to 5,376, the highest total since 1996.
- Passenger deaths rose 6.6 percent to 22,441, the most recorded since 2009.
- Pedalcyclist fatalities increased 12.2 percent to their highest level since 1995.

In response, NHTSA, the Department of Transportation and the White House have announced “a call to action” to examine the reasons behind the increase in traffic fatalities. NHTSA

notes that “the last single-year increase of this magnitude” was recorded in 1966, when fatalities jumped 8.1 percent from the previous year.

Read the August issue at <http://sb-m.ag/2ctDzDo>.

DOL: Tractor-trailer truck drivers at increased risk of injury, death

WASHINGTON – One out of six U.S. workers killed on the job is a tractor-trailer truck driver, according to a recent blog post from the Department of Labor.

The Aug. 17 post highlights the increased risk of injuries, illnesses and fatalities among tractor-trailer drivers. It notes that truck driver fatalities increased annually from 2009 to 2014 – the most recent years for which data is available. A total of 761 tractor-trailer drivers were killed in 2014.

Other highlights from the blog post:

- Heavy truck or tractor-trailer drivers are three times more likely than other U.S. workers to sustain an injury or illness requiring days away from work.
- Approximately half of all truck drivers needed at least 20 days away from work to recover from an incident; 42 percent of tractor-trailer drivers required at least 31 days.
- Injuries from slips, trips and falls were the most common cause of missed workdays, followed by overexertion injuries caused by tasks such as loading and unloading cargo, pushing and pulling containers, and entering and exiting the vehicle.

To read the blog post, go to <http://sb-m.ag/2bY4ZOB>.

STATISTICS

May traffic deaths increase in 2016

By Kevin T. Fearn

Motor vehicle deaths in May totaled 3,480, up 5 percent from the May 2015 total.

Medically consulted motor vehicle injuries for the first five months of 2016 are estimated to be about 1.8 million. As a result of a refinement made this year to the medically consulted injury estimate, comparison of medically consulted injuries to previous years is not appropriate.

The cost of motor vehicle collisions through May is estimated to be about \$166 billion. The costs include wage and productivity losses, medical expenses, administrative expenses, employer costs, and vehicle damage. Due to recent updates to the National Safety Council's cost model, comparison of current year cost estimates to previous years is not appropriate.

The estimated annual population death rate for 2016 is 12.9 deaths per 100,000 population, an 8 percent increase from the preliminary 2015 rate of 11.9. The estimated annual mileage death rate is 1.3 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles traveled, an increase of 8 percent from the preliminary 2015 rate of 1.2.

Notes to table

Deaths are reported by state traffic authorities. All figures are preliminary. To ensure proper comparisons, 2014 and 2015 figures cover the same reporting period as those for 2016. The total for 2014 is from the National Center for Health Statistics. States shown in color had fewer deaths in 2016 than they did in 2015 for the same reporting period.

STATE MOTOR VEHICLE DEATHS, CHANGES AND RATES UNITED STATES, FIVE MONTHS, 2014-2016

STATE	NO. OF MONTHS	DEATHS IDENTICAL PERIODS			PERCENT CHANGES	
		2016	2015	2014	2015 TO 2016	2014 TO 2016
TOTAL U.S.	5	15,430	14,210	13,167	9%	17%
Alabama	5	380	312	352	22%	8%
Alaska	5	24	22	25	9%	-4%
Arizona	5	367	362	304	1%	21%
Arkansas	5	207	197	152	5%	36%
California	5	1,339	1,325	1,144	1%	17%
Colorado	5	186	195	150	-5%	24%
Connecticut	5	115	77	88	49%	31%
Delaware	5	47	37	52	27%	-10%
District of Columbia	5	6	6	11	0%	-45%
Florida	5	1,354	1,185	950	14%	43%
Georgia	5	588	531	427	11%	38%
Hawaii	5	42	39	45	8%	-7%
Idaho	5	82	60	52	37%	58%
Illinois	5	414	350	327	18%	27%
Indiana	5	311	287	226	8%	38%
Iowa	5	142	110	107	29%	33%
Kansas	5	155	125	151	24%	3%
Kentucky	5	293	263	235	11%	25%
Louisiana	5	262	243	220	8%	19%
Maine	5	54	52	47	4%	15%
Maryland	5	188	178	151	6%	25%
Massachusetts	5	148	114	114	30%	30%
Michigan	5	349	306	317	14%	10%
Minnesota	5	136	140	118	-3%	15%
Mississippi	4	153	162	192	-6%	-20%
Missouri	5	327	302	284	8%	15%
Montana	5	67	49	56	37%	20%
Nebraska	5	71	95	83	-25%	-14%
Nevada	5	121	120	112	1%	8%
New Hampshire	5	50	33	26	52%	92%
New Jersey	5	211	201	214	5%	-1%
New Mexico	5	156	104	133	50%	17%
New York	5	303	-	-	-	-
North Carolina	5	543	500	431	9%	26%
North Dakota	5	35	48	39	-27%	-10%
Ohio	5	384	398	347	-4%	11%
Oklahoma	5	270	242	256	12%	5%
Oregon	5	182	164	106	11%	72%
Pennsylvania	5	449	447	411	+*%	9%
Rhode Island	5	21	17	18	24%	17%
South Carolina	5	384	365	293	5%	31%
South Dakota	5	34	36	57	-6%	-40%
Tennessee	5	412	351	360	17%	14%
Texas	5	1,520	1,359	1,370	12%	11%
Utah	5	102	99	72	3%	42%
Vermont	5	29	14	13	107%	123%
Virginia	5	277	278	260	-*%	7%
Washington	4	151	144	141	5%	7%
West Virginia	5	92	99	82	-7%	12%
Wisconsin	5	221	210	166	5%	33%
Wyoming	5	24	49	53	-51%	-55%

*Change less than 0.5%.

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DRIVING TIP

Staying healthy on the road

It can be hard for anyone to stay active and healthy. For commercial truck and bus drivers, who are on the road for long stretches of time and away from home-cooked meals, it can be even more difficult. But with a little planning, it can be done.

The Department of Veterans Affairs recommends purchasing a power inverter for your truck, as it allows you to run a small microwave, mini refrigerator or electric cooler. In turn, you'll be able to store your own food to make healthier meals and snacks than you typically could get when eating out.

If you're able to safely store fresh foods in your truck, keep balance, variety and moderation in mind, VA notes. Healthy foods to pack include fresh and canned fruit in its own juice with no added sugar; whole grain breads and cereals; fresh vegetables; low-fat dairy products; and high-protein meats such as chicken, turkey, salmon and tuna.

To avoid the temptation of excess snacking, VA recommends packing your own individually portioned snacks, such



as hummus with pita chips; one-quarter-cup servings of various nuts, such as almonds, walnuts and pistachios; crackers with peanut butter or cheese; and low-fat yogurt.

Other tips to stay healthy while on the road include:

- Start your day with a filling, balanced meal. Eating three smaller meals and a few snacks throughout the day, rather than eating two to three fast-food meals, is a healthier option, VA states.
- Remember to stay hydrated. Keep a supply of bottled water in your truck at all times.
- Take a break to walk whenever you can. Even short walks can help combat fatigue and stretch sore muscles. However, be sure your surroundings are safe first.