

Big Trucks

They're intimidating, those huge tractor-trailers and straight trucks that barrel down the highway. Big trucks make other vehicle operators acutely aware of their mortality because of their length (60 feet or more), width (up to 102 inches) and weight (80,000 pounds or more fully loaded). More than a million big trucks – dump bodies, single tractor trailers, western doubles, Rocky Mountain doubles, turnpike doubles, and triple combination rigs – operate on U.S. roads. With deregulation of the trucking industry since 1980, new rigs are being put in service faster than ever. These big trucks account for more mileage and longer hauls per vehicle than smaller trucks. They're also nearly twice as likely as smaller trucks to be in crashes – three times as likely as smaller trucks and passenger cars to be in fatal crashes.

Widespread truck safety problems involve equipment that is poorly maintained (especially brakes) and operated too often by less than-qualified drivers who have been at the wheel for too many hours. Hazardous cargo is sometimes transported under unsafe conditions. Due to ever-increasing competition, operations often extend into unfamiliar areas and cities. Roadways aren't always up to handling the biggest rigs. These problems are even worse because of sharing the road with cars; the big rigs weigh 30 or 40 times as much as cars, and take far greater distances to stop, pass, turn, and accelerate.

At the same time, we need big trucks. They haul three-fourths of the dollar value of all freight in the United States. We have to find ways to live with the big rigs, to reduce the crash damage they cause without crippling the industry. Control measures which can be taken to make big trucks operations safer include the following:

- All requirements of the Commercial Drivers License Act should be adhered to by big truck owners and operators. See Loss Control Data Guide F.13550 for additional information.
- All federal, state and local laws pertaining to the operation of big trucks should be obeyed at all times by big truck owners and operators.
- A Drug Free Workplace Program, utilizing postjob offer, post-accident, "for cause" and random drug and alcohol testing should be implemented.
- All drivers should be given initial and periodic training on safe driving techniques.
- A Preventive Maintenance Program should be developed and implemented for all vehicles.
- A pre, post, and in-route vehicle inspection program should be developed and implemented.
- All vehicle accidents should be investigated, cause(s) determined, and action taken to prevent recurrence.
- Tachographs should be utilized to record speed, driving time, and other information. Devices should operate continuously and automatically, and indicate when the case containing the record sheet is opened or tampered with.
- All trucks should be equipped with speed limiting devices.
- Braking capability should be improved by only purchasing new trucks that are equipped with antilock braking systems and load-proportioning brake valves.

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- Trucks with drum brakes should be fitted with automatic adjusters to maintain brake performance.
- All trucks should have operating brakes on the front axles.
- Attention should be given to upgrading tires used. Recapped tires should not be used on the front axles.
- All tractors and single unit trucks should be equipped with power steering to help drivers maintain control.
- Effective underride guides should be installed on the backs of all trucks.
- Trailers should be equipped with retroreflective sheeting that meets the requirements of Federal Motor Carrier Vehicle Safety Standard S.5.7.1.
- Based on their cargo, big trucks should be properly placarded per all applicable Federal and State D.O.T. regulations.
- Route analysis should be completed to identify “safe” routes for big trucks. Truck size and configuration, cargo hauled, population densities, and type of roadways should be utilized in the route analysis process.

Contact your local Great American Loss Prevention Specialist for additional information.

The loss prevention information and advice presented in this brochure are intended only to advise our insureds and their managers of a variety of methods and strategies based on generally accepted safe practices, for controlling potentially loss producing situations commonly occurring in business premises and/or operations. They are not intended to warrant that all potential hazards or conditions have been evaluated or can be controlled. They are not intended as an offer to write insurance coverage for such conditions or exposures, or to simply that Great American Insurance Company will write such coverage. The liability of Great American Insurance Company is limited to the specific terms, limits and conditions of the insurance policies issued.
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