

LARGE TRUCKS ARE EXTREMELY DANGEROUS

Crashes involving trucks weighing more than 10,000 pounds¹ (large trucks) are far too frequent, horrific and costly.

- According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, “Large trucks often weigh 20-30 times as much as passenger vehicles. They are taller and have greater ground clearance than cars, which means that lower-riding vehicles can slide beneath truck trailers, with deadly consequences.”²
- According to preliminary figures released by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), in 2021, more than 5,600 people were killed in crashes involving large trucks, “the largest number in almost four decades....”³
- NHTSA said, “Deaths in crashes involving trucks hit a ‘crisis’ level and reversed a downward trend in place before the pandemic,”⁴ increasing by 13% from 2020 to 2021 and constituting a 52% increase in truck crash fatalities since 2010, a record high.⁵
- In the first three months of 2022, according to preliminary federal data, there were already more than 40,000 crashes involving large trucks as reported by states, killing more than a thousand people and injuring nearly 17,000.⁶
- By some estimates, truck crashes cost the nation \$180 billion a year.⁷

Driver fatigue causes too many serious large truck crashes.

- Truck drivers experience unique working conditions that cause too many sleep disruptions,⁸ which creates “cognitive impairments” that cause drivers to crash.⁹
- Drivers often face pressure from employers to continue to drive when they’re too tired. Explained Thomas Corsi, academic director for supply chain management at the University of Maryland’s Robert H. Smith School of Business:

I serve as an expert witness on accident cases which overwhelmingly occur when drivers are working on not enough sleep and end up plowing into a car because they’re working way too many hours. They’re on very strict time commitments that a broker or a carrier made to a client, but there are huge safety implications. These guys clearly are really stretched.¹⁰

Federal agencies and Congress are not doing enough to protect motorists from large truck dangers.

- NHTSA and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration — as well as Congress — often bow to trucking industry pressure to weaken existing regulations, fail to remedy urgent problems in a timely manner or do anything at all.
- Dangers that safety advocates say are not being properly addressed include:
 - Underride crashes, which are violent “collisions in which a car slides under the body of a truck — such as a tractor-trailer or single-unit truck — due to the height difference between the vehicles.”¹¹
 - Failure to require automatic emergency braking systems¹² and speed limiters on heavy trucks.¹³
 - Blind spots and other visibility problems.¹⁴
 - Dangerous “chameleon carriers,” which are trucking companies that try to hide their identity and evade federal penalties and fines, as well as legal liability.¹⁵

E-commerce demands are creating new safety problems.

- Some companies responding to increasing demand for more long- and short-haul trucks, such as Amazon with about 40% of the e-commerce market,¹⁶ have endangered the public with a troubling truck safety record.¹⁷
- In the rush to get new drivers on the road, large truck driver training has dangerously suffered, greatly increasing roadway hazards.¹⁸
 - To drive a large truck, “there’s just a medical exam, a multiple-choice written exam, and a brief driving test — which in some states can be administered by the school that drivers paid to train them.” Said Lewie Pugh, who owned and operated a truck for 22 years and is now executive vice president of the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association, “We don’t want to do the hard things in this industry, which is spending extra money, taking extra time to train people to safely operate trucks.”

For more information, see Center for Justice & Democracy, *Big Trucks: An Avoidable Public Safety Crisis* (November 2022), <https://centerjd.org/content/study-big-trucks-avoidable-public-safety-crisis>

NOTES

¹ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, *Large Trucks: 2020 Data* (April 2022), <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813286>

² Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, Highway Loss Data Institute, “Large Trucks” (August 2022), <https://www.iihs.org/topics/large-trucks>

³ Jonathan D. Salant, “Deaths in truck crashes jumped 13% as feds continued to ignore recommended safety steps,” *NJ Advance Media*, May 21, 2022, <https://www.nj.com/politics/2022/05/deaths-in-truck-crashes-jumped-13-as-feds-continued-to-ignore-recommended-safety-steps.html>, citing National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, *Early Estimates of Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatalities And Fatality Rate by Sub-Categories in 2021* (May 2022), <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813298>

⁴ John Gallagher, “Truck crash deaths jump 13% to ‘crisis’ level,” *FreightWaves*, May 17, 2022, <https://www.freightwaves.com/news/truck-crash-fatalities-jump-13-to-crisis-level>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, *Motor Carrier Safety Progress Report (as of June 30, 2022)*, <https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/safety/data-and-statistics/motor-carrier-safety-progress-report-june-30-2022> (last updated September 22, 2022).

⁷ See, e.g. Office of U.S. Representative Jamie Raskin press release, “Members of Congress and Truck Safety Coalition Call for Lifesaving CMV Safety Advances Following Release of Deadliest Truck Crash States Report,” September 19, 2022, <https://raskin.house.gov/press-releases?id=B9BDD875-A3D6-44D0-A3FF-23AD35E86006>; Truck Safety Coalition, “Why We Need The Truck Safety Coalition,” <https://trucksafety.org/> (viewed September 13, 2022).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Karen Heaton, Rachael Mumbower and Gwen Childs, “Sleep and Safety Decision-Making Among Truck Drivers,” *69 Workplace Health & Safety* 134 (March 2021), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.1177/2165079920950255>)

¹⁰ John Gallagher, “Truckers are filing coercion complaints with the feds at a record pace,” *FreightWaves*, April 11, 2022, <https://www.freightwaves.com/news/truck-driver-coercion-complaints-on-record-pace>

¹¹ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Truck Underride Guards: Improved Data Collection, Inspections, and Research Needed* (March 2019), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/697585.pdf>

¹² Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, “Study shows front crash prevention works for large trucks too,” September 3, 2020, <https://www.iihs.org/news/detail/study-shows-front-crash-prevention-works-for-large-trucks-too>

¹³ National Transportation Safety Board, “Implement a Comprehensive Strategy to Eliminate Speeding-Related Crashes,” March 25, 2022, <https://www.nts.gov/Advocacy/mwl/Pages/mwl-21-22/mwl-hs-01.aspx>; National Transportation Safety Board, *2021-2022 NTSB Most Wanted List of Transportation Safety Improvements*, <https://www.nts.gov/Advocacy/mwl/Documents/2021-2022/2021-22-MWL-Brochure.pdf>

¹⁴ The National Transportation Safety Board has a number of recommendations. National Transportation Safety Board, *National Transportation Safety Board Evaluation of The US Department of Transportation 2021 Report to Congress on the Regulatory Status of the Safety Issue Areas on the National Transportation Safety Board’s Most Wanted List* (May 2022), <https://www.nts.gov/news/Documents/NTSB%20Evaluation%20of%20DOT%202021-22%20MWL%20Final.pdf>

¹⁵ U.S. General Accountability Office, *Motor Carrier Safety: New Applicant Reviews Should Expand to Identify Freight Carriers Evading Detection* (March 2012), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-12-364.pdf>

¹⁶ Sara Lebow, “Amazon will capture nearly 40% of the US ecommerce market,” *Insider Intelligence*, March 23, 2022, <https://www.insiderintelligence.com/content/amazon-us-ecommerce-market?ecid=NL1001>

¹⁷ Christopher Weaver, “Amazon Routinely Hired Dangerous Trucking Companies, With Deadly Consequences,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 22, 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/amazon-trucks-crash-safety-11663793491>

¹⁸ Alana Semuels, “There’s a Problem With How We Train Truckers,” *TIME*, February 7, 2022, <https://time.com/6144516/truck-driver-training/>