

Truck Drivers Are Speeding - A Federal Regulation Will Slow Them Down

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Thousands of commercial truck drivers are ignoring the safety risks of operating their tractor trailers at excessive speeds. A pending federal safety rule will slow them down.

Enforcement Exercise- During one week In July 2023, 11,448 passenger and commercial motor vehicle drivers were cited for unsafe driving. This exercise was part of "Operation Safe Driver Week," organized in the U.S. and Canada each year by the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance.

Results - The top violation cited for commercial truck drivers? Excessive speeding.

The top five commercial motor vehicle violations:

1. Excessive Speeding (27%)

Excessive speeding was the top infraction issued to commercial motor vehicle drivers, receiving 2,290 warnings, tickets, and citations, or 27% of the total number. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, speed-related crash fatalities represented 29% of traffic fatalities in 2021.

2. Recordkeeping and Other Driver Violations (26%)

After pulling commercial drivers over for the initial violation, officers frequently found other infractions. These included not having a registration certificate, insufficient records, not carrying proof of insurance, exceeding size, and weight requirements, and operating defective equipment. Commercial truck drivers were issued 2,216 tickets, citations, and warnings, or 26% of all violations.

3. Failure to Obey Traffic Control Devices (12%)

There were 1,035 infractions (12%) by commercial truck drivers for not obeying a traffic control device. Violations in this category included disobeying a traffic sign, failure to yield, ignoring a traffic light or sign and similar unsafe driving practices.

4. Not Wearing a Seat Belt (11%)

Commercial motor vehicle drivers received 922 warnings, tickets, and citations for not wearing a seat belt, or 11% of the violations. Nearly half of the large truck occupants who died in crashes in 2021, were not wearing a seat belt.

5. Distracted Driving (3%)

Texting or using a handheld device was the fourth top violation among truck drivers, with 288 tickets, citations, and written warnings to drivers. Research shows that the odds of being involved in a safety critical event (such as a crash, near-crash, unintentional lane deviation) are six times greater for

commercial motor vehicle drivers who engage in using a mobile phone while driving. For that reason, the U.S. DOT restricts the use of all handheld mobile devices by commercial motor vehicle drivers.

A Pending Federal Regulation Will Limit Excessive Speeding

Everybody agrees that a vehicle's speed is a major factor in the frequency and severity of crashes. That's why the U.S. DOT will soon propose a federal safety regulation to limit a large commercial truck's top speed.

This federal rule will likely be a simple one. Drivers will be required to turn on their truck speed limiters, a device that has been standard equipment on all trucks for 30 years. Drivers will set the device, not to exceed the prescribed maximum federal speed limit for all large trucks.

Of course, drivers will operate their trucks at various speeds, as they do now. But only up to the maximum top speed. If they exceed the speed and are detected by law enforcement, truck drivers could receive a federal safety violation, similar to going over their on-duty hours.

Will truck drivers get speeding tickets at slower speeds? Of course, but at least truck drivers will be limited to their top speed. Because stopping a tractor trailer going 75 mph takes a considerably longer distance than stopping from 60 mph. Speed limiters will reduce the frequency and severity of large truck crash fatalities and injuries.

This regulation will also be a stress reducer. You'll no longer see a tractor trailer roaring by at an unsafe speed within a few feet of your car; or, when slowing down on the interstate highway to enter a construction zone, you won't have a large truck coming up behind you, going way too fast. A federal speed limit rule will slow down large trucks. Everyone - truck drivers and motorists alike - will benefit. And lives will be saved.

(The Trucking Alliance is a non-partisan coalition of transportation, logistics and other businesses that support safety reforms to eliminate all large truck crash fatalities.)