

Why Don't Some Truck Drivers Wear A Safety Belt?

Lines of Business: General Liability, Workers Compensation, Auto

Risk Control Strategy / Key Issues: Wearing a safety belt is the simplest and most effective way to stay safe, yet many drivers of large trucks still don't do it. A 2005 U.S. Department of Transportation report found the average safety belt use among all truck drivers was only 54 percent compared to 82 percent of passenger car drivers. DOT also reported an increase in the number of fatalities among truck drivers who don't use a seat belt.

When safety belts are used, the potential for crash-related injuries and death increases dramatically. Crash-related injuries can affect a driver's livelihood if the driver cannot work – even if only for a few months. Serious injuries can have a tremendous emotional and financial impact on the driver's family.

Why are safety belts, especially lap/shoulder belts, so effective in reducing injuries, fatalities and the costs of operating large trucks? The answer is found in the results of recent studies of vehicle crashes and national crash data.

Here is a summary of why safety belts are effective:

- Safety belts, especially lap/shoulder belts, will spread the stress and impact forces of a crash along the stronger and broader areas of your body, such as the hips and shoulders, thereby limiting injuries.
- Lap/shoulder belts hold you in place while the vehicle absorbs the impact of the crash and decelerates.
- The safety belt protects your head and spinal cord.
- A safety belt will prevent you from being ejected from the vehicle.
- Safety belts prevent serious injuries and fatalities by minimizing the possibility of truck occupants striking the steering wheel, shift lever, windshield, dashboard, side doors, windows, roof, or other occupants or objects in the cab.
- In a crash, a safety belt will keep you firmly behind the steering wheel and, usually, in some control of the vehicle, thereby avoiding or reducing the possibility of a secondary collision.
- Safety belts can keep you from being knocked unconscious, thus improving your chances of escape. Fire or submersion occurs in less than 5% of fatal large truck crashes. The possibility of either event occurring is not a valid reason for driving unprotected by a safety belt system.
- In 2004, 168 truck drivers died in accidents when they were ejected from their cabs. In a frontal collision occurring at 30 mph, unbelted, you will continue to move forward at 30 mph causing you to hit the windshield at about 30 mph. This is the same velocity a person falling from the top of a three-story building would experience upon impact with the ground. Unconstrained, you or your passengers retain momentum and continue to move forward; the truck doesn't.

Web Site Links:

- National Safety Council
<http://www.nsc.org/Pages/Home.aspx>
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
<http://www.nhtsa.gov/>
- National Transportation Safety Board
<http://www.nts.gov/>

9 MYTHS ABOUT SAFETY BELTS FOR TRUCK DRIVERS

MYTH 1 Safety belts are uncomfortable and restrict movement.

FACT A 2005 Transportation Research Board study on commercial drivers' safety belt usage found that most drivers find wearing safety belts to be uncomfortable or too restrictive of their movements. Once they correctly adjust the lap and shoulder belt, most drivers find that discomfort and restrictive movement alleviated.

MYTH 2 Wearing a safety belt is a personal decision that doesn't affect anyone else.

FACT The consequences of you not wearing a safety belt can certainly affect your family and loved ones. It can also affect other motorists since wearing a safety belt can help you avoid losing control of your truck in a crash. It's the law; federal regulations require commercial vehicle drivers to buckle up.

MYTH 3 Safety belts will prevent from escaping from a burning or submerged vehicle.

FACT Safety belts can keep you from being knocked unconscious, thus improving your chances of escape. Fire or submersion occurs in less than 5% of fatal large truck crashes.

MYTH 4 It would be better for me to be thrown clear of the wreckage in the event of a crash.

FACT An occupant of a vehicle is four times as likely to be fatally injured when thrown from a vehicle. In 2004, 168 truck drivers died when they were ejected from their cabs during a crash.

MYTH 5 It takes too much time to fasten and unfasten my safety belt; I'd have to do it twenty times a day.

FACT Buckling-up takes about three seconds. Even buckling-up twenty times a day requires only two minutes.

MYTH 6 I'm a good truck driver; I don't need to wear a safety belt.

FACT Good drivers usually don't cause collisions. It's likely, however, that during your career you will be involved in a crash caused by a bad driver, foul weather, mechanical failure, or tire blowout – causes beyond your control. Safety belt may prevent you from sustaining injuries or becoming a fatality by preventing ejection, and by protecting your head, spinal cord, organs and limbs.

MYTH 7 The size of my truck will protect me. A Safety belt is unnecessary.

FACT In 2004, 634 drivers of large trucks died in truck crashes and 303 of those drivers were not wearing safety belts. Of the 168 drivers who were ejected from their vehicles and killed, almost 75% were not wearing safety belts.

MYTH 8 Safety belts aren't necessary when I'm driving at low speed.

FACT In a frontal collision an unconstrained driver is highly likely to strike the windshield, even at a relatively low speed. This may occur in a truck or a passenger car.

MYTH 9 A lap belt offers sufficient protection.

FACT A lap belt absorbs a lot of the force in a collision, but it doesn't constrain the head or protect the spinal cord or chest from injury. A combination lap and shoulder safety belt is far superior to either element alone.

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