

# TRUCKERS

## 'WHAT'S THE LARGEST CONTRIBUTOR TO SAFETY?'



TruckSure By Trevor Toohill

Is it the driver?

How about fleet maintenance?

What about the Company culture?

Could it be investment in technology?

My personal view is that the driver is the key, and, without doubt, the single largest factor in trucking safety.

Much has been said and the debate continues as to how the industry can improve driver performance and therefore safety records.

Naturally a huge emphasis must be placed on the driver component. However, there is a real trend in trucking to install some gizmo to try to assist a subpar driver to survive through his career of close calls.

The fact remains – you cannot remove the human element from trucking and why would you want to?

But...driver training and education aside, it is a slow process improving driver stats. This means the industry must invest in technology in its trucks and trailers to help both the good drivers and the bad.

Last July I covered technology in my article 'Upspec' For Safety' and a fair bit of interest was generated. We are pretty well techno advanced in New Zealand and already have shown a willingness to adopt new technology as it becomes available.

The big question is – which gizmo will give me the best bang for my bucks? Even more to the point, what is out there to raise my safety levels and bring the drivers and the trucks home in one piece?

To even consider this question you have to understand that in the end safety is not a cost. It is a saving!

During the research for that article I was able to get a very good handle on the techno features being relied upon by some of the largest fleet operators in the US. They support the view that almost without exception all technology installed in their vehicles is primarily to assist the driver

in controlling a situation and therefore preventing an accident or restricting the incidence of damage, injury, or death.

Most popular with these transporters were lane departure warning systems and rollover stability control.

Rollovers are the driver's worst nightmare and have a high probability of deadly results. Long haul operators have a particular exposure to their drivers drifting off the road in late night shifts. This technology has been particularly successful in detecting drift and warning the driver in time to take evasive action. Rollover stability takes the next step in helping the driver bring the situation back under control.

US companies are combining this with forward-looking radar with foundation brake application.

Investment in these technologies alone could show an accident reduction rate exceeding 25% and are cost effective investments.

Night vision screens have produced interest, particularly for the fresh food freight movement just-in-time for the early morning delivery market – exposure to night driving.

Collision avoidance systems, warning drivers of excessive closure rates to reduce rear-end collisions.

GPS communication device. If all you show about a driver is the number of panic brake applications in a month, you can predict the likelihood of a calamity in the months ahead.

Video event recorders. If there is a significant movement of the vehicle, like a hard stop, the 20 seconds of video before and after that event is saved. The file is uploaded and sent via cellular technology back to the programme administrator. It's one thing to say Driver Bob has 10 hard stops so he's an unsafe driver – but what if those were all legitimate actions he took to avoid a pileup?

Speed limiters.

Orange seat belts to encourage visibility and use.

GreenRoad technology. This helps the driver improve in the areas of lane handling, acceleration pattern, corner handling, speed handling and braking pattern. In addition, this device will improve fuel consumption. The GreenRoad Service combines in-vehicle technology with integrated Web-based applications that continuously rate driving skills and behaviour and provides real-time feedback to drivers. Drivers are positively motivated to change their behaviour behind the wheel, and constant reinforcement encourages them to sustain behaviour improvements. Users typically reduce crashes by up to 50 percent and cut fuel usage and emissions by up to 10 percent.

As far as mechanical improvements are concerned there is no doubt that truck manufacturers are continuously innovating their vehicles and today's truck is a far departure from its 1990's counterpart. Undoubtedly the truck of the 2020's will be technically unrecognisable.

Right now the popular safety inclusions in manufacturer's specs are air disc brakes, automatic tyre inflation systems, wheel-end temperature monitors detecting bearing failure, air release on the fifth wheel to prevent injuries, LED lighting, automatic transmissions aides concentration and fatigue reduction, and low stopping-distance brake shoes.

On having just read through what I have been writing it is pretty obvious that we in New Zealand are right up there with our US counterparts and all this technology is readily available to us right now. I think that the only difference is the rate of uptake into our vehicles here compared to what is becoming standard overseas.

We have quite a way to go yet. **TA**



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