

MEDIA RELEASE



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NEW ACCIDENT STUDY RAISES QUESTIONS ABOUT TRUCK MONITORING

The vast majority of fatigue-related truck accidents occur within the first five or six hours of a driver's journey, according to a new study by Australia's major truck insurer, National Transport Insurance.

The chairman of the Australian Trucking Association, Trevor Martyn, said the study raised important questions about the safety benefits of electronic heavy vehicle speed and fatigue monitoring. Australia's transport ministers have decided to press ahead with electronic monitoring without holding a trial first.

"The NTI study shows that driver fatigue and inappropriate speed for the conditions accounted for almost one in two serious truck accidents," Mr Martyn said.

"But the vast majority (89.3 per cent) of the fatigue crashes occurred on outbound journeys within 500 kilometres of the point of departure. What's more, one in four fatigue crashes were on Mondays – for many, the start of the working week.

"None of these accidents would have been prevented by electronic fatigue monitoring, because the drivers would have been well within the regulated hours programmed into the electronic systems.

"According to the study, the vast majority (77.5 per cent) of the speed-related crashes were due to trucks rolling over because they were going too fast when they changed direction.

"Again, many of these accidents would not have been prevented by electronic speed monitoring. The trucks could well have been travelling within the legal speed limit, but were going too fast for the conditions.

"The study shows that governments can't rely on fatigue and speed monitoring to reduce truck accidents. What the industry needs are specifications that would allow operators to use their existing fleet management systems, which in many cases already have the capability to record speed and driving hours.

"This would reduce the administrative burden on truck drivers, which would make their jobs easier and help them avoid fines for innocent mistakes. The records produced by the systems would be available for independent audit and verification.

"Instead of relying on electronic monitoring to reduce accidents, the industry and governments need to place a renewed emphasis on driver health and on making sure that drivers are fit for duty when they start work.

"The best way that trucking companies can do this is to join the ATA's TruckSafe program, which has a mandatory driver health module. Every operator in the TruckSafe program has to meet strict standards on driver health and is audited regularly.

“As the study points out, consignors need to make a conscious effort to reduce stress and fatigue at the start of drivers’ shifts by using better loading practices, making sure departures occur on time, and making sure time slots are achievable.

“The study also suggests that governments need to focus on building more rest areas within a 500 kilometre radius of the major cities, so drivers can easily find a place to stop and cool down after the teeth-grinding frustration of getting loaded and getting through the city traffic.

“The Australian Government is deciding the rest areas that will be funded in the first year of its \$70 million Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program. The ATA will be drawing these study results to the Government’s attention as it finalises the program,” he said.

Mr Martyn said the study confirmed the safety benefits of building better roads, with a substantial reduction in the number of accidents on the Hume, Pacific and Newell highways in New South Wales.

“Later this year, the Australian Government will announce the first nation building projects under its Building Australia Fund. The trucking industry has urged the Government to continue investing in roads, which will improve safety for every road user and boost Australia’s productivity,” Mr Martyn said.

The NTI study examines the cause of 325 major crashes that occurred in 2007, and builds on previous studies conducted by the insurer in 2003 and 2005.

The NTI crash study reported can be downloaded from www.nti.com.au

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