



Speeding – The Commercial Drivers' Choice

Ripped from recent headlines - A popular comedian's limo was rear-ended by a speeding tractor-trailer on the New Jersey Turnpike. A total of six vehicles were involved, however only passengers in the limo were injured. This included one fatality, several broken bones, and comatose victims. The driver in the tractor-trailer failed to observe slow-moving traffic ahead of him, according to the New Jersey state police. As a result of the crash, the commercial truck driver was charged with aggravated manslaughter.

Excessive speeding is a major cause of catastrophic accidents and fatal crashes. Obeying the speed limit is critical to safe operation of any motor vehicle and especially true for trucks. An 80,000 lb out-of-control truck can cause severe damage to vehicles, life altering injuries, death, loss of valuable cargo, and damage to surrounding property. The cost of a life or disabling injury is immeasurable. The cost of property damage and a bad reputation can be staggering and bankrupt a business.

Following speed limits and choosing to go even slower based on poor road conditions, weather, lighting or traffic are critical skills of a safe commercial driver. Most speeding accidents are preventable by choosing not to speed. The choice to NOT speed and drive safely for conditions can only be made by the driver.

In crashes, large trucks most often strike the vehicle in front of them. A large truck needs sufficient space between it and the vehicle in front to allow for safe braking or other evasive action if necessary. At greater speeds, a driver must add one additional second. For example, if the driver is operating a forty foot vehicle at 35 mph, he should be able to count at least four seconds between the time the vehicle ahead passes a fixed object and when the truck driver passes it. In a sixty foot rig, there should be a six-second space. At speeds over 40 mph, there would need to five extra seconds for a forty foot vehicle and seven extra seconds for a sixty foot vehicle. If a driver is following too closely, the driver should fall back and count again until a safe following distance is established. Braking distance is also affected by the condition of the road surface, rain, snow, ice and road debris and speed adjusted accordingly.

Speed limits posted on curve warning signs are intended for passenger vehicles, not large trucks. Large trucks should reduce their speed even further. Studies have shown

that large trucks entering a curve, even at the posted speed limit, have lost control and rolled over due to their high center of gravity. Forty percent of speeding-related fatalities occur on curves. Braking in a curve can cause the wheels to lock up and the vehicle to skid.





Approach an exit/entrance ramp at a safe speed. Truck rollovers are more likely to occur on exit/entrance ramps when the driver misjudges the sharpness of the ramp curve and enters the curve at an excessive speed. The posted speed limit on an exit/entrance ramp generally shows the safe speed for a passenger vehicle; the safe speed for a large truck is significantly lower than the posted speed. Even though ramps and interchanges make up less than five percent of all highway miles, twenty to thirty percent of all large-truck crashes occur on or near ramps.

Always exercise more caution with a loaded trailer. Loaded trailers have a higher center of gravity and sudden speed adjustment may cause the load to shift and lead to skidding or a rollover. Large trucks with fully loaded trailers are ten times more likely to roll over than those with empty trailers. Loaded trailers require twenty to forty percent more braking distance than passenger vehicles to come to a complete stop.

Speed increases all of the following:

- perception-reaction distance
- braking distance
- stopping distance

Speeding in Adverse Weather Conditions or on Wet Roads

Adjust your speed to safely match weather conditions, road conditions, visibility, and traffic. The Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) recently reported that twenty-five percent of speeding-related large-truck fatalities occurred during adverse weather conditions.

Manufacturers generally advise drivers not to use a retarder (also called a “Jake” brake) on wet or slippery roadway conditions. You should reduce your speed by 1/3 on wet roads and by 1/2 or more on snow packed roads. (i.e., If you would normally be traveling at a speed of 60 mph on dry pavement, then on a wet road you should reduce your speed to 40 mph, and on a snow-packed road you should reduce your speed to thirty mph.) When you come upon slick, icy roads, drive slowly and cautiously and pull off the road if you can no longer safely control the vehicle.

Are Your Drivers Speeding?

Consequences of speeding can be costly to a trucking company. Vehicle crashes, bad reputation with law enforcement, high CSA scores, and increased insurance cost are just a few of the consequences of hiring drivers who speed. Drivers must know their pre-screening profile (PSP) and motor vehicle record (MVR) will reflect speeding violations. As an owner or manager, you can help your drivers by:

1. Have driver training and reoccurring training to continue awareness on speed and space management.
2. Have GPS alerts company vehicles that send text alerts when trucks exceed certain pre-set triggers such as speeding and hard braking.





3. You can install speed governors on equipment. An added benefit for speed governors is fuel savings.
4. You can be sure drivers are dispatched with more than enough time to make on time deliveries.
5. Implement a safe driving bonus for driver with no citations or incidents
6. When all else fails, drivers can be placed on a progressive discipline plan that could ultimately lead to termination.

Legal truck speeds limits vary from 60 to 75 miles per hour based on individual state laws and types of commercial vehicles. While 75 miles per hour may be the maximum, it's not necessarily a good idea for 80,000 lb vehicle to move down the highway at this speed.

Recommendations to Promote Safe Driving and Preventing Speeding

1. Require drivers with repeated speed violations to complete the CLMI video curriculum that includes Rear End Accidents and Speed and Space Management. Drivers should take the quiz at the end of the training course to demonstrate they understand the material presented in the video.
2. Require drivers with repeated speed violations to drive with a driver trainer and complete defensive driving training.
3. Provide a driver evaluation as a part of the driver job performance. This could be used for promotions and raises at later dates. The driver's evaluation should include, but not be limited to, customer reviews, on time performance, number of moving violations/warnings, and compliance with company policies.
4. Enforce a company policy requiring drivers obey posted speed limits at all times. Drivers should be required to sign that they have read and understand the company policy. This policy should include owner operators contracted with the fleet as well.
5. Review MVRs at least bi-annually to determine if drivers may have received moving violations in their personal vehicle prior to completing the annual statement of violations document in the beginning of the calendar year.
6. Implement a progressive discipline policy for drivers receiving moving violations or caught speeding. The policy should include, but not be limited to, 1. retraining, 2. a verbal warning, 3. a written warning, 4. ride alongs, 5. termination. Drivers should be given the opportunity to demonstrate that with redirection and retraining they can comply with company policy and transportation regulations.
7. Install or turn down speed governors on trucks to a selected speed to keep drivers from speeding.
8. Make a part of your safety bonus plan about safe driving, no moving violations, no warnings, no out of service tickets, and annual completion of safety training.

References: FMCSA website, January 2016; US DOT – Large Truck and Bus Crash Facts, April 2015

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