AUSTRALIAN TRUCKING ASSOCIATION

DECADE OF ACTION FOR ROAD SAFETY 2011-2020

TRUCK SAFETY IMPROVES DRAMATICALLY

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- **New report shows the fatal crash rate for articulated trucks has improved more than 60 per cent since 1982.**
- **Safety gain is particularly due to road improvements, reduced speed limits and vehicle design.**
- **Research should now focus on driver fatigue, seatbelt use, better roads and vehicle design and technology.**

The fatal crash rate for articulated trucks like semitrailers has improved more than 60 per cent since 1982, the Chairman of the Australian Trucking Association (ATA), David Simon, said today.

Mr Simon was releasing a major new report on heavy vehicle road safety from the Centre for Automotive Safety Research (CASR) at the University of Adelaide. The report was commissioned by the ATA and funded by the ATA Trust.

An improving safety record

Mr Simon said the report confirmed the industry was steadily getting safer.

“The number of fatal crashes involving articulated trucks has remained relatively constant since 1991, but there has been a huge increase in the number of trucks on the road at the same time,” he said.

“When the figures are adjusted to take this increase into account, they show a 60 per cent improvement in the fatal crash rate involving articulated trucks since 1982.”

The report concludes that the most significant gains in truck safety during this period were due to broad road safety initiatives that have improved safety for all road users, particularly improvements to the road network (including divided highways and sealed shoulders), reduced speed limits and improvements in vehicle design.

An authoritative reference guide about truck safety

One of the ATA’s goals in funding the report was to create an authoritative reference guide to the research already done into truck safety.

“This research has been published in a host of different academic journals, reports and studies. It is often difficult to find, particularly for people in the industry who need guidance about how to make their businesses safer,” Mr Simon said.

“The report consolidates 280 publications from CASR’s extensive road safety library and a series of academic databases. It is a single, ready reference guide to truck safety research, and the ATA is releasing it for everyone to use as our contribution to the UN Decade of Action for Road Safety.”

Future research priorities

The report sifts through the evidence about truck safety and identifies the areas where further research could deliver the greatest safety gains at the lowest cost.

“Although the industry’s safety record has improved markedly, it won’t be good enough until every truck driver and motorist gets home safely after every trip,” Mr Simon said.

“CASR has recommended four priority research areas: fatigue, seat belts, road design and traffic management, and vehicle design and technology. The ATA Safety Committee, chaired by WA trucking operator Mark Sullivan, is considering these recommended priorities as it develops the ATA’s safety research program.”

Fatigue

The report concludes that any research with the potential to improve the trucking industry’s management of fatigue should be encouraged.

“Notably, the report recommends more research into the therapies and treatments for sleep apnoea, which can be an important cause of driver fatigue,” Mr Simon said.

Seat belts

The report refers to estimates that only four to 30 per cent of truck drivers wear seat belts. Increasing their seat belt use would prevent 37 per cent of truck occupant fatalities, 36 per cent of serious injuries, and 22 per cent of slight injuries.

“The report recommends further research into the effectiveness of installing seat belt reminder warning lights in trucks, as well as seat belt interlocks,” Mr Simon said.

“There also needs to be more work done on seat belt comfort. We know that many drivers do not wear seat belts because they are uncomfortable and feel restrictive, particularly when not integrated into the seat.”

Road design and traffic management

The report recommends further research into road design and traffic management, including an assessment of the safety benefits of the truck-only lanes and speed restrictions that are now being put in place on some routes.

“The report also endorses simple measures like sealing shoulders as a cost effective way of improving safety along freight routes, and points out that rest areas throughout Australia are inadequate,” Mr Simon said.

Vehicle design and technology

The report also calls for further improvements in the crashworthiness of truck cabins and the aggressivity of truck design. Aggressivity is the technical term for a vehicle’s impact on other road users in a crash.

“As new safety technologies become available, trucking operators will also need unbiased information about their effectiveness and how best to use them. The ATA is providing this information through our series of Technical Advisory Procedures, and the ATA Industry Technical Council is now working on new advisories about electronic braking systems and underrun protection,” Mr Simon said.

About the ATA: The Australian Trucking Association is the peak body that represents the trucking industry. Its members include state and sector trucking associations, major logistics companies and operators and suppliers with leading expertise in truck technology.

The report is available at www.atatruck.net.au/publications.html

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