Large truck crashes resulted in nearly 4,000 deaths in 2013.

While the number of truck crashes has trended downward over the last few decades, a recent spike over the last three years is cause for concern.

On average, nearly 21% of vehicles and 5.5% of drivers targeted for inspection had out-of-service defects noted.

Commercial trucking safety is on NTSB’s Most Want List of critical safety improvements.

CONDUCT PRE-TRIP INSPECTIONS. CHECK FOR PROPER BRAKE ADJUSTMENT AND ENSURE MAINTENANCE ON BRAKE SYSTEMS WITH AUTOMATIC SLACK ADJUSTERS.

WHEN PURCHASING NEW TRUCKS, REQUEST THOSE WITH DIRECT TIRE PRESSURE MONITORING, LANE DEPARTURE WARNING, AND COLLISION WARNING SYSTEMS—ALL TECHNOLOGIES AIMED AT REDUCING OR MINIMIZING THE IMPACT OF CRASHES.

IMPLEMENT A FATIGUE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM BASED ON THE NORTH AMERICAN FATIGUE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM.

ESTABLISH POLICIES TO ADDRESS DISTRACTED DRIVING CAUSED BY CELL-PHONE USE AND BE PROACTIVE TO ENSURE A DRIVER IS FIT FOR DUTY.
Most Wanted List Issue: Strengthen Commercial Trucking

Recent Crash History

Commercial trucking is integral to our economy, but crashes, injuries, and deaths involving commercial trucks have been increasing over the past several years.

We rely on commercial trucks to deliver food and goods to our local grocery stores, medical supplies to our pharmacies and hospitals, and packages to our loved ones. But because of their sheer size, weight and physical properties, commercial trucks introduce a disproportionate hazard to passenger vehicle occupants in a crash.

The safety of the commercial trucking industry gained national media attention on June 7, 2014, when a celebrity was critically injured and another passenger died in a crash in New Jersey involving a commercial truck. The limousine bus in which they traveled was struck by a truck-tractor and semitrailer combination vehicle. Contributing to the crash was the truck-tractor driver’s fatigue.

While it was the uncommon involvement of a celebrity that focused attention on this crash, commercial truck crashes are anything but rare. The NTSB recently completed an investigation of a crash in which a tractor-trailer crossed a median and collided with a motorcoach in Orland, California, on April 10, 2014, killing 10 and injuring 40 others. The inability of the tractor-trailer truck driver to maintain control of the vehicle due to his unresponsiveness for reasons that could not be established contributed to the crash. Also in 2014, the NTSB completed the investigation of the collapse of a span of the Skagit River Bridge in Mount Vernon, Washington, due to a high-load strike by a commercial truck. Contributing to the crash was insufficient route planning and the failure of the pilot/escort vehicle to perform required duties...due in part to distraction caused by cell phone use. In addition, we completed our investigation into a truck-train collision in Rosedale, Maryland, resulting in the derailment of a freight train, a post-crash fire, and a subsequent explosion. This crash was caused in part because of driver distraction due to a hands-free cell phone conversation.

Improving the safety of truck operations will not only save lives, but improve the public’s confidence in this vital, and visible, industry.

The NTSB is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the U.S. and significant accidents in other modes of transportation—railroad, highway, marine and pipeline. The NTSB determines the probable cause of each accident investigated and issues safety recommendations aimed at preventing future accidents. In addition, the NTSB carries out special studies concerning transportation safety and coordinates the resources of the Federal Government and other organizations to provide assistance to victims and their family members impacted by major transportation disasters.

October 2015