

Are Heavy Trucks Safe On Our Roads?



Accidents Involving Heavy Trucks

There is a community perception that heavy trucks are unsafe and cause accidents. However 80% of accidents involving heavy trucks and cars are caused by the car driver, as most truck drivers have far greater driving experience than the average motorist.¹

The accidents that involve trucks are also on the decline with the number of fatalities involving heavy vehicles falling by over 35% from 1990 to 2009 even though heavy vehicles travelled over 29% more kilometres in the same period.²

The Best Driver for the Job

Transport operators want to make sure that the people they place behind the wheel are suited to the job. Heavy trucks are an expensive investment, therefore operators employ the best drivers to drive the biggest vehicles. Many heavy vehicle drivers are psychometrically tested before being employed, unlike the average road user.

¹ Monograph 8, Fatal Articulated Truck Crashes (ATSB)

² http://www.bitre.gov.au/publications/95/Files/IS41_Fatal_Road_Crashes.pdf

Experience Counts

Most accidents involve inexperienced drivers and it is a sad fact that over 20% of all drivers killed in Australia are aged 17 to 25.³ This has no bearing on the safety of heavy trucks, as it is virtually impossible for a driver in this age bracket to gain employment as a multi-combination vehicle driver.

It takes an average of 6 years to get a Multi-Combination licence which is required to drive any B-Double or road train. Even if a driver gains this licence in the minimum time after earning their “L” plates at age 16, there is little chance of them gaining employment due to insurance restrictions. Only seasoned drivers drive heavy combination vehicles.

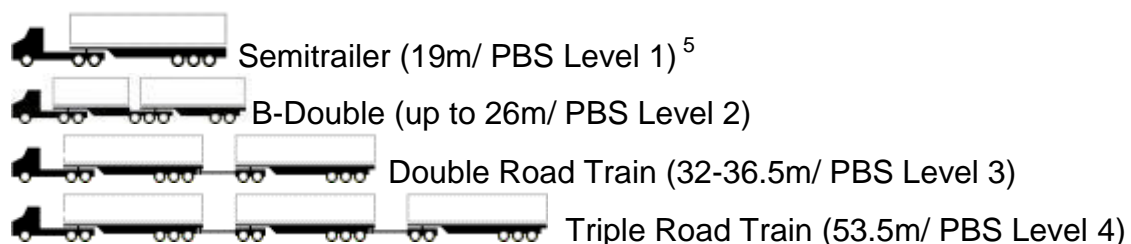
Drug and Alcohol Testing

Heavy vehicle drivers involved in fatal accidents are less likely to be affected by alcohol or drugs than other drivers. Testing of drivers has shown that while alcohol or drugs affected 35% of all drivers involved in fatal crashes, the figure for heavy vehicle drivers was a fraction of that.⁴ Introduction of “Chain of Responsibility” laws and random drug testing in some states is expected to lower the number of truck involved serious accidents caused or exacerbated by alcohol and other substances.

Bigger Trucks Mean Fewer Trucks

The use of multiple trailer combinations decreases the number of trucks on our roads, making them safer for all road users. The table below details the load capacity comparisons of trucks. A Double Road Train can carry twice the load of a Semi, and a Triple Road Train can carry three times as much. By using bigger trucks that can carry more, the number of trucks on our roads is reduced, reducing congestion and therefore reducing accidents.

RAV (Restricted Access Vehicle) Recognition Guide (maximum length)



³ BITRE, *Road Deaths Australia*, June 2010 http://www.bitre.gov.au/publications/66/Files/rda_june2010.pdf

⁴ BITRE, *Fatal road crashes in Australia in the 1990s and 2000s: Crash Types and Major Factors*, 2010 http://www.bitre.gov.au/publications/95/Files/IS41_Fatal_Road_Crashes.pdf

⁵ Note: Semitrailers are General Access Vehicles – they can legally travel on all roads.