

# Improving Truck Driver Safety



as long as the vehicle complied with the design rules and was roadworthy then that was enough. About a decade ago, however, work safety regulators became pre-eminent. They required employers to identify the hazards, evaluate the associated risks and reduce them to a very low level. But what does that mean in the cabin of a truck? Because the cabin of a truck is a workplace, it may mean selecting vehicles that have proven safety technologies, even if they are not mandated.

Over the past five years a new trend has emerged. Powerful consumers of logistics services started demanding their carriers use the latest safety and environmentally friendly gear. This could only enhance their public reputation. Vehicle manufacturers started seeing tenders that specified electronic brake systems, clean-burn engines and low noise levels to name some important examples. This was an important new 'vector' for specification change.

At the Brisbane meeting another 'change vector' became apparent. Three major national fleets within the NBTA advocated mandating trailer roll-stability systems within their industry sector. Trailer roll-stability program (TRSP or TRS) is available in Australia as a feature of a trailer Electronic Brake

System. Considering that even antilock brakes are not mandated on trailers in Australia, this was a significant call. The advocates of TRSP say it has been proven to substantially reduce trailer roll-overs and, if widely adopted, it would greatly improve heavy vehicle safety. They want all their competitors to experience the benefits of TRSP and genuinely want to improve truck driver safety.

But government has become shy about regulating for safety technologies. More stringent requirements in federal regulations, such as the Australian Design Rules, need to be justified by a Regulation Impact Study. Angus Draheim (Office of National HV Regulator) pointed out how difficult the process can be for regulators. Often it is better for industry to decide what technologies are effective and to develop industry codes of practice to provide good guidance. Regulations cannot keep up.

A human fatality is costed at about \$2.5m in a Regulation Impact Study. Notice the irony in leading operators calling for government regulation whilst the government is calling for industry leadership. Scott Denning of OAMPS Insurance Brokers presented some key statistics from the latest NTI safety review (for 2009). The safety performance of the

heavy vehicle industry is gradually improving. However, a staggering 70% of heavy vehicle crash claims are single vehicle crashes.

A pleasing trend is that driver fatigue as a principal crash cause has reduced somewhat over the past couple of years. Chain of responsibility legislation can claim some credit for this. Fatigue is still the principle cause in 10 % of truck crash claims and inappropriate speed mixed with fatigue in 40% of crashes. Inappropriate speed for conditions is a significant factor in more than 30% of crashes. Whilst speed is clearly the driver's responsibility, the questions need to be asked – what is the safety margin and can technology improve that margin? Better vehicle dynamic stability and braking performance might be able to halve the speed factor influence.

Tony Sheldon of the TWU called for a partnership approach between operators and employees. It is important that work practices promote better safety outcomes and that improved performance by drivers is appropriately recognised. Tony also stressed the importance of different interests in the industry co-operating to

achieve better outcomes for all. Rob Di Christiforo of Advantia spoke about the importance of real-world experience to verify likely safety gains before it is mandated. It is very difficult to run controlled tests of technology, therefore it is critical to capture real Australian experience and make it known.

Colin White of Isuzu pointed out the great progress that had been made over the past decade in safer, quieter and more fuel efficient vehicles. This has resulted from competitive pressures between manufacturers in our very dynamic marketplace. Alan Yates of Cootes Transport reminded the meeting that Australia is a world leader in the design and manufacture of bulk tankers; a fact the industry should be proud of.

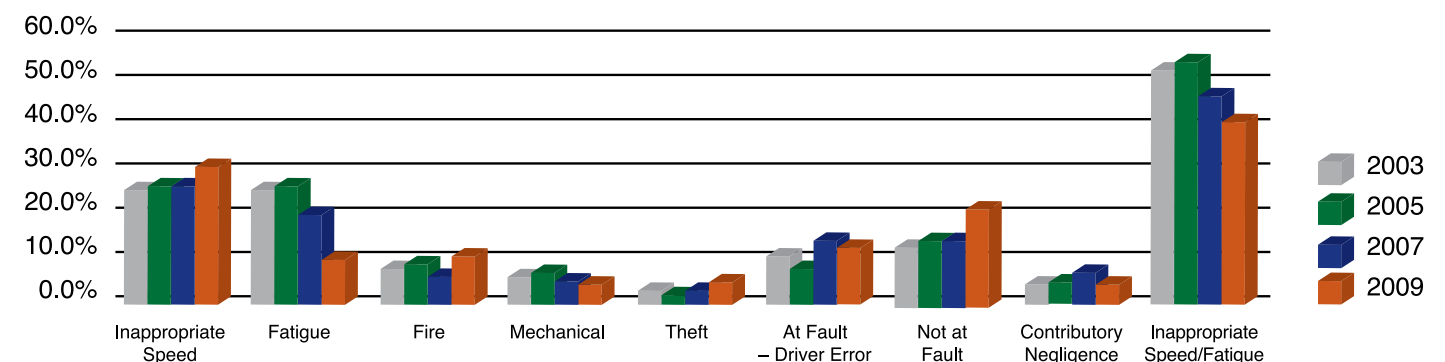
My contribution was to nominate the top ten safety technologies with the potential to save lives. These are:

- 1 Electronic stability control on trucks and trailers (TRSP).
- 2 Suspension seats with integral seatbelts to improve seatbelt wearing comfort.
- 3 Lane departure warning/intervention technology.

- 4 Adaptive cruise control that maintains a safe following distance.
  - 5 Improved truck ride quality for both road handling and cabin comfort.
  - 6 Wheel nut tightness indicators or locks.
  - 7 Trailer side underrun protection (light guard protection for pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists).
  - 8 Improved proximity vision using mirrors, cameras and infra-red sensors.
  - 9 Truck roll-away warning/intervention.
  - 10 Power line proximity warning devices for vehicles that can be lifted above the 6m height.
- Each of these technologies have excellent prospects for success whilst being cost effective and practical for operators.

By Peter Hart  
Chairman, ARTSA

**A**RTSA and the National Bulk Tanker Association held a joint meeting at the Brisbane Truck Show, something we have also done in the past. It makes sense for organisations with complementary experience and requirements to talk together. After the formalities we got down to very important business, holding a symposium on how the sensible adoption of technology might improve truck driver safety. There has been a quantum shift in perceptions of safety over the past two decades. We used to expect government to regulate our safety responsibilities –



Principle heavy vehicle crash claim causes, National Transport Insurers (www.nti.com.au).