

Crashes cause majority of deaths for truck drivers

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U.S. government report finds 1 in 3 who died weren't wearing seat belts.

(HealthDay)—Crashes cause 65 percent of on-the-job deaths of truck drivers in the United States, making it the top cause of work-related deaths in that occupation, a federal government report shows.

There are about 2.6 million people in the United States who drive trucks weighing more than 10,000 pounds. The number of crash deaths among these drivers and their passengers fell to a 35-year low in 2009, but rose between then and 2012.

In 2012, about 317,000 [crashes](#) involving large trucks were reported to police. Seven hundred drivers of large trucks or their passengers died in crashes, and about 26,000 were injured.

More than a third of the truck drivers who died were not wearing a seat belt, according to the *Vital Signs* report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"We know that using a seat belt is the single most effective intervention to prevent injury or death in a [motor vehicle crash](#). However, in 2012, more than one in three truck drivers who died in crashes were not buckled up, a simple step which could have prevented up to 40 percent of these deaths," CDC Principal Deputy Director Ileana Arias said in an agency news release.

"Employers and government agencies at all levels can help improve truck driver safety and increase seat belt use among truck drivers by having strong company safety programs and enforcing state and federal laws," she added.

One-third of long-haul [truck drivers](#) have been involved in one or more serious crashes during their driving careers, the report said.

About 14 percent of long-haul truckers said they did not use a seat belt on every trip. Those who said they didn't wear a seat belt also tended to have other unsafe habits, such as speeding, and to work for an employer without a written workplace safety program.

Long-haul truckers who live in states with laws that permit police to stop motorists for not wearing a seat belt were more likely to say they often use a seat belt, according to the report.

Stephanie Pratt is the coordinator of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health Center for Motor Vehicle Safety. She said, "Using a seat belt is the most effective way to prevent injury or death in the event of a crash," in the news release.

"The smartest strategy for overall safety is to prevent truck crashes from happening in the first place. Employers can help prevent crashes and injuries through comprehensive driver safety programs that address other known risk factors such as drowsy and distracted driving," she said.

Trucking companies should create and enforce company [safety](#) policies, including seat belt requirements for drivers and passengers, and bans on text messaging and the use of handheld phones, the report suggested.

Increased enforcement of seat belt laws by state troopers could also encourage truckers to buckle up. Changes in truck engineering and design that provide truckers with improved comfort, range of motion and adjustments for different body types might also help increase seat belt use.

More information: The American College of Emergency Physicians has more about [seat belts](#).

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