

You Should Be Concerned About Trucks On the Highways

Joan Claybrook of Public Citizen (LINK IT: <http://www.citizen.org/>) says you have every reason to be concerned about sharing the road with tractor trailers. Claybrook, President of Public Citizen, says trucks are involved in a high number of accidents, and **truck accidents** put both the truck drivers and the rest of the public at risk for serious injury.



“People should absolutely be concerned,” according to Claybrook. “There are 700 truckers killed in truck accidents in a year and 5,000 people in cars also killed in those accidents. Truck driving is a dangerous occupation – drivers work very long hours. A lot of these accidents are caused by tired truckers.”

The Clinton administration took steps toward regulating the number of hours truckers could drive, but those regulations were not put into place. Public Citizen attempted to force the Bush administration to regulate the trucking industry by filing (and winning) lawsuits, but no action was taken by the administration.

Hours of service is a big issue – a financial issue. According to Claybrook, “hours of driving is a key issue. It’s all about money. Truck drivers are not paid overtime—under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) they were considered exempt—so there is a tremendous push for them to drive as far or as fast or as long as possible, even if it means cheating on their hours. Employers push truck drivers to do this and they’re scared not to. Federal law allows them to drive a long time, anyhow—11 hours of driving time a day—which adds up to huge hours per week.”

Another major issue with tractor trailer and other large trucks is enforcing the rules that exist to limit a driver’s hours of service. Although there are devices that could be installed in a truck to track the truck’s movement, which could be checked by a police officer who stops the truck to determine how many hours the truck was driven, there are no laws requiring trucks to have the device. Instead, truck drivers are only required to fill out paper forms regarding hours of service – which makes it easy to underreport hours. In fact, Claybrook notes that these **logbooks** are often called “comic books” because it is so easy to lie about hours.

"People have every right to be concerned about large trucks on the road," Claybrook says. "We should do more long-distance transport of cargo by train. Eighty percent of cargo is taken by trucks, but for long-distance travel, train is much less dangerous.

"Truck drivers have good intentions of being safe drivers. The problem is they are pushed beyond their capacity to work too many hours. Furthermore, the roadways are not designed for larger trucks. Unfortunately, in the last year the trucking industry has exercised so much power that change is not happening, except where lawsuits force the industry to change."