Understanding road user attitudes and behaviours to improve heavy truck safety: Findings from recent NSW attitudinal research

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Abstract

Crashes involving heavy trucks are often more serious because of their size and weight, regardless of who is at fault. An increase in fatal heavy truck crashes in 2017 as well as construction projects in Sydney led to the need for research to help inform future strategy, policy and communications in this space. Mixed-method attitude and behaviour research was conducted among heavy truck drivers, fleet managers, enforcement personnel and other road users. The findings are discussed.

Introduction

Compared to 2016, during 2017 there were 15 more fatal heavy truck crashes, and 23 more fatalities from heavy truck crashes.. A range of countermeasures are targeted towards improving heavy truck safety. This research aimed to understand how the behaviour of all drivers can be improved by enhancing these, or introducing further measures.

Methodology

The study involved:
- qualitative research with heavy truck drivers, fleet managers, enforcement personnel and other road users (car/van/ute drivers, motorcycle/scooter riders, bicycle riders and pedestrians) ,
- quantitative research of n=402 face-to-face surveys with NSW licenced heavy truck drivers and n=1,894 online surveys with other road users.

Results

Perceptions of the heavy truck industry

'Trucks on the road' were not seen as a key contributor to the road toll among other road users compared to factors such as speeding, drink and drug driving, mobile phone use and driving while tired. However words spontaneously associated with heavy trucks include their large size then danger, and crashes. Feelings of nervousness (45%) or fear (38%) when around heavy trucks were also expressed, significantly more among females than males.

Behaviour of truck drivers on NSW roads

The unsafe behaviours considered most often engaged in by other truck drivers were tailgating, driving when tired, using a hand-held mobile phone and speeding. Unsafe behaviours self-reported as most frequent were driving while tired, speeding, being distracted by devices/controls in the cabin, not wearing a seatbelt and using a hand-held mobile phone.

Experiences of truck drivers

Pressure from truck companies on their drivers does not appear to be extensive but does exist – most frequently in relation to meeting delivery schedules and time slots, and pressure to drive through mandatory rest breaks.

The majority of truck drivers said other road users cut in front of them or travel in their blind spot at least weekly (94% and 81%). Just over half (55%) reported other road users overtaking them when trying to turn on a daily basis.

Attitudes and behaviours of other road users

Other road users' main concerns of truck drivers were: them driving while tired; driving after taking illegal drugs; speeding, using a hand-held mobile phone and driving when over the legal BAC limit.

Around two-thirds (64%) of other road users claim they never cut in front of heavy trucks and almost three-quarters (73%) claim not to overtake heavy trucks when turning. However, these risky behaviours were more likely to be admitted by drivers 17-39 years.

Safety initiatives in the workplace

While nearly all truck drivers reported feeling safe driving for their company, 30% believe their company puts productivity above safety. This rises to 37% among metro based drivers.

Conclusions

 Findings suggest that each group has concerns about the other regarding road safety behaviour. However, these behaviours are not frequently self-reported by the respective groups; indicating there is work to be done to improve the behaviour of each group and ensure they are aware of the impact their driving has on other road users.