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Submission received via email

Hi, My name is Selwyn Sinfield. I started driving heavy vehicles in 1962 age 19 and retired 2018 age 75. A 56 year career. Some of my work has been where I worked up to 36 hours with no sleep. That was in the 1960s.

Log book regulation was only brought to Tasmania about 15 years ago. At that time I was working 7 days a week @ 12 hours a day as a casual employee. Middle management of the company at the time, when asking of my views on new regulation (log book / work diary) was amazed to hear me say I liked the new law as it gave me one day a week off work without risking my employment.

Fatigue has many scopes that will impact the driver. This is my opinion after experiencing many differing things that can cause a driver to feel drowsy.

In my mid years of long hours up to 18 hour days I never felt drowsy while driving, when driving on the west coast of Tasmania due to the many corners and hills. If I was not turning the steering I was changing gear or slowing for down hill driving for good control.

When I started driving the north / south route which is much flatter and straighter road it was very easy to feel drowsy when only working 11 / 12 hour days. Over the years the vehicles have been made more powerful (faster) and the roads have been made straighter. The straighter the road the less a driver has to do with body limbs or to think about the next move required to be done to negotiate any object or bend in road. When in this situation this is when I would feel most drowsy due to the constant drone of the truck engine and road noise. This I found to be a semi hypnotising effect to me causing me to stop more frequently to walk around and get fresh air, so I could continue with reasonable safety to get home to my family. Bigger hours on winding roads I rarely stopped due to drowsiness.

As the years progressed the trucks became more modern with greater power and extra fittings that need to be watched, all while traffic numbers have increased which has taken away some of the ability to stay well clear of smaller vehicles. This is then entwined with the more direct steering to trucks which are in such a manner that the very slightest of movement of the steering wheel causes the truck to wander very quickly, either into oncoming traffic or off the left of the road.

Trucks from the 80s had lower geared steering which needed more turns to go from full lock to full lock the other way. When driving these older trucks, if a driver was drowsy his clasped hand position on the steering wheel could move 75 mm and be a miniscule movement of the truck line on the road. Some of these earlier trucks would not be in the opposing lane until it had travelled at least 150 to 200 meters

Today's trucks however a movement of 75 mm of steering wheel position would see the truck off the road or in the middle of the opposing lane in a distance of around 80 meters or less. This is dangerous.

The example I gave can be proved by using a Mack truck of the 70s or 80s against the current model Mack truck on a training circuit in controlled conditions to see the difference.

I use the Mack for the example as I have driven both older and the latest models of these. Other truck makes I have driven I have not driven both older and newer models. However all older had lower gear steering, while all modern within the last 10 years have had very direct steering. In the

modern truck I have many times found I was not keeping to my lane without 100% attention. A truck driver has to keep watch on left and right mirrors, make sure all instrument's are in order and no overheating or air loss situations are happening. Simply a truck driver has to take his vision from the straight ahead attention to watch mirrors for any happening by smaller vehicles, a lot more often than any car driver needs to do. This can cause the truck driver to not have the 100% forward view at all times, add to this the direct steering on later trucks and the driver is soon more fatigued than he should be, then add long hours for interstate drivers and you have a very serious problem. Some of this problem can be lessened by lowering the steering ratio and should reduce the off road single vehicle crash on straight roads as we see often in mainland states. I have seen many news items where trucks have gone off road on very straight section of road.

My 56 years in trucks has resulted in being involved in only one accident in 1966. That was a drunk driver in a Holden van head on. He was on my side of road, I tried to avoid but in doing so the 5 day old truck was written off. That makes my driving record of 52 years accident free a proud record I hope to keep for rest of my life.

I find that even my 9 year old Toyota has more direct steering than my 90s Ford. This causes me to stop more frequently for rest than when driving the older car. Same result as trucks. But trucks are a bigger missile.

Today's standards of straightening roads, >> direct steering, >> more speed, >> more traffic congestion, >> larger truck combinations,>> poor training for heavy vehicle drivers, >> employing overseas drivers who are not trained for or understand the Australian law for heavy vehicles, >> employers not allowing younger than 23 age drivers to be instructed on driving heavy vehicles by older drivers with good records.

All of those contribute to road accidents with trucks where the truck is the lone vehicle involved. This is also compounded by new drivers irrespective of age not listening to advice from drivers with more years experience in the industry.

In road upgrades is there really a need for straighter roads when the curve is slight, why does it need to be done away with.

Cut trees back from road side to a distance of that the mature tree full growth height so if it falls it does not become a blockage on the road. This would also allow better vision in some area's as well as stopping ice formation as well.

Why can't this common sense factor be used in road building and upgrades.

Driving into the sun on warm days can cause drowsy events, even with air con going. My experience is if one eats a meal like mixed grill size and drives soon after I have felt drowsy within the hour. I moved from buying meals like that and started taking a cut lunch. Then if feeling drowsy I would eat one sandwich and drink water, this would refresh me for up to an hour most times.

Eating larger meal is a bit like the christmas dinner where we eat large amount then sit in a chair and doze off for 40 winks.

Another thing I would like to mention. A company in Tasmania have recently put a screen for data in their trucks. In doing so the phone detail of incoming call was taken from the dash /speedo screen which is directly in front of the driver. This hands free system has steering wheel button to answer the call. When the new data screen was fitted to new trucks it was mounted to left of driver and

the incoming call is displayed on the data screen on drivers left needing driver to look left to see the incoming call. This takes the drivers eyes from straight ahead for longer than quick glance to speedo area.

When looking to dash there is still some peripheral vision of the forward area.

Looking left to the newly fitted data screen there is no peripheral vision of any sort in the area to the front of truck.

These data screens are fitted to most multi national and large Australian companies trucks. By doing so it takes the drivers attention away from his responsible liabilities to drive safely.

WHY add these extra distractions to the driver area.

All these distractions added to my original comments of steering being too direct makes for a recipe for trucks veering from their lanes way sooner than older trucks would have. Older trucks did not have these added data screens.

I would like to see information and detail of the amount of trucks veering off the road on long straight sections before 1990 as compared to last 3 to 5 year period to see if my thoughts are correct.

Before 1990 truck steering was lower geared.

Kind regards

Selwyn Sinfield