



LESSONS LEARNED

Vehicle Accidents Are Preventable

by Frederick C. Clark, ARM
Vice President, Transportation Services

Over 60 percent of vehicle accidents involve an unsafe act by the company driver, which contributes to the cause of the crash. Speed management, lack of defensive driving skills and aggressive driving are common causes that show up in accident analyses. The following accidents represent the three most common types of crashes that a commercial fleet experiences.



OVERTURNED VEHICLE

In his tanker, John had picked up a load of placarded hazardous material for delivery in a city 150 miles away. He had six hours of driving time left on his log for the day. Plenty of time to be home for the evening, he thought. This was a run that John had driven numerous times in the past. The dispatcher had said that the load was needed in the early afternoon. The weather was clear and dry. As the tractor trailer exited into the cloverleaf from the westbound interstate highway, the tandems of the cargo tank trailer lifted from the roadway surface causing the unit to overturn. As the unit came to rest on the embankment and the cab of the tractor was crushed, John was fatally injured.

The accident analysis concluded that the causes were driver inattention, lane position and speed management (unit traveling too fast for conditions). The ramp was designed for a speed of 25 mph for tractor trailers. However, the unit was traveling 30 to 35 mph at the time of the overturn and crash.

REAR-END CRASH

After a long day — eight hours and 20 minutes of “on-duty driving,” and four hours and fifteen minutes of “on-duty not driving,” Martin was glad he was only 30 minutes away from the yard. Though it was early evening —just before dusk— traffic was still a little heavy due to the commuter rush. The tractor trailer had followed a sedan in the center lane of the highway for several miles, with a two to three car-length “space cushion.” Traffic was flowing at 50 mph. It was a warm, dry summer evening.

As the sedan crested the rise in the highway, traffic had come to a halt, causing the driver to “pull” a panic stop. Martin similarly pulled the tractor trailer into a panic stop. Unfortunately, he did not stop until the sedan was rear-ended.



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Two people in the sedan were fatally injured and one person sustained major injuries. Martin was uninjured.

The accident analysis concluded the crash was caused by driver inattention and following too close. The average total stopping distance for a passenger car traveling at 50 mph is 243 feet and for a combination vehicle is 375 feet — a difference of 132 feet. A three car length (16') space cushion amounts to 48 feet.

MERGING CRASH

Over five hours ago, Muriel left the docks with a trailer load of freight and was approaching the city to make her delivery. Traffic was moderate for early afternoon and most vehicles were traveling 55 mph in the northbound lanes. It was a cool, clear, bright, sunny day, and the roadway was dry. Muriel's tractor trailer was in the number three lane of the four lane highway. The overhead signs warn of upcoming highway interchange merges from the left and from the right. Another tractor trailer was on the left in the number four lane. Because this lane was an "exit only" lane, the tractor trailer decided to move right — 30 feet in front of Muriel's vehicle. Consequently, Muriel decided to change lanes to the number two lane on the right.

At the same time a little further north, a car was entering the highway from the eastbound interchange to proceed north in the number one lane. A second car heading north in the number one lane decided to change lanes left into the number two lane at the same instant Muriel was changing lanes.

The tractor trailer's right tractor tandem wheels contacted the front right fender of the car causing it to spin out of control. The resulting crash caused serious injuries to the driver of the car, which was totaled. The tractor trailer received minor damage.

The accident analysis concluded that lack of defensive driving skill, inattention and aggressive driving were the causes.

PREVENTION PAYS

The preceding accidents were all preventable. Increased training, a program of retraining and strong encouragement of safe driving and improved safety awareness are usually the indicated corrective actions in these cases. Sometimes disciplinary measures are also necessary to eliminate these accidents.

Frederick Clark has a BS degree in Chemistry and over 30 years of experience in the safety, health and environmental field. He has gained expertise in many aspects of personal and fleet safety and loss control management. He serves the fleet safety needs and distribution-related needs of clients by providing training, assessments, risk analyses, and other loss prevention programs.

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XL Environmental
Risk Control Division
505 Eagleview Boulevard
Suite 100
PO Box 636
Exton, PA 19341-0636
Phone: 800-327-1414
Fax: 610-458-7285
www.xlenvironmental.com