



LESSONS LEARNED

Poor Visibility Results in Fatality

SUN GLARE BLAMED IN TRAGIC ACCIDENT

A commercial truck driver was traveling east-bound on State Route 172 at approximately 6:30 a.m. on a clear morning. The driver reported that there was severe sun glare, making it difficult to see. As he came around a sloping, left-hand



bend in the road he was looking directly into the sun and was temporarily blinded. As he was moving through the bend at approximately 50 miles per hour he heard a thump, checked his passenger side mirror, and saw a man falling from a bicycle onto the road.

The bicyclist, a cashier at a local truck stop, sustained severe head injuries and was air-lifted from the scene to an emergency trauma center. The police report indicated that there were no visible obstructions that would have prevented the driver from seeing pedestrians, bicyclists, or other motorists on the right side of the road. The driver was confirmed negative for controlled substances or alcohol in a post-accident test.

CONSEQUENCES

The bicyclist remained in a coma for three weeks until he died of his injuries. He left behind a wife and four children.

The truck driver was charged with vehicular manslaughter. The criminal charges are still pending but he has been unable to find work as a commercial driver since the accident.

Total costs so far are in excess of \$500,000 for medical care and other expenses. Reserves are funded at \$500,000 but final costs could total several million depending upon the outcome of the driver's criminal case and the settlement for the bicyclist's family.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

- Poor visibility
- Speed unsafe for conditions
- Failure to anticipate road conditions
- Failure to anticipate other persons or objects in the road

LESSONS LEARNED

The trucker was driving too fast for conditions. If visibility is impaired for any reason (heavy rain, snow flurries, dense fog, sun glare) the driver must reduce speed so that he maintains safe control of the vehicle. If visibility is so poor that travel at any speed is unsafe, the vehicle should be pulled well off the road and parked until conditions improve.

Drivers should always anticipate road conditions. In this case it was reasonable to expect sun glare while traveling eastbound on a clear morning. Using a good pair of sun glasses or the truck's sun visor may have mitigated the glare and made it safe to operate the vehicle.

Drivers must "expect the unexpected." Even with perfect visibility and optimum road conditions, drivers cannot always see around a bend or turn. They must anticipate slow traffic, a stalled vehicle, animals in the road, or pedestrians and bicyclists at the side of the road, even on a highway or freeway where pedestrians are prohibited. Slowing down on blind curves or on the crest of hills is always appropriate.

ACTIONS TAKEN

The trucking company made the accident the focus of a mandatory driver's safety meeting. Conditions, causes, and lessons learned were discussed and drivers were asked for their own suggestions on how to prevent such occurrences in the future. Management authorized drivers to delay travel times if sun glare could not be safely controlled and was a hazard to vehicle operation.

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