

October Our Town Casper

TRAGEDY TURNS INTO A COMMITMENT FOR CHANGE

Daphne Izer's son Jeff and three of his teenage friends were killed when a truck driver fell asleep at the wheel and slammed his 80,000-pound rig into their vehicle. Izer and his friends were on their way to a hay ride and had just pulled onto the highway shoulder.

After the crash, Daphne and her husband Steven started Parents Against Tired Truckers (PATT) and have worked tirelessly to push for new laws that improve highway safety. They have promoted the use of new technology for greater logbook accountability and fought for improved health and safety standards for truck drivers.

Since 2009, deaths and injuries from truck accidents are on the rise. A report by the American Association for Justice (AAJ) outlines lax practices and outdated economics that allow overworked, underpaid, and poorly trained drivers on the roads. "Truck Safety Alert: Rising Danger from Trucks and How to Stop It," details safety hazards in the trucking industry, including a compensation program that promotes fatigued driving and ignores safety risks, and inadequate insurance limits that shift the cost burden to taxpayers, medical insurance carriers, and Medicare.

According to the report, artificially low insurance limits prevent unsafe trucking carriers from ever being held responsible for the full amount of damage they cause. A fatal truck crash costs approximately \$4.3 million in direct costs, yet the insurance minimum for cargo trucks has remained at \$750,000 since 1980. Adjusted for inflation, the rate would be equal to \$2.2 million today, or \$4.4 million adjusted for the equivalent in medical care dollars. This allows companies and drivers to take risks that jeopardize public safety.

"Not only are consumers who share the roads with trucks at risk, but so are truck drivers who operate in an industry that incentivizes risky driving conditions," said former AAJ president Mary Alice McLarty. "Congress needs to address the antiquated trucking insurance requirements," added McLarty.

The report concludes with suggested, market-based solutions that would make strides towards increased safety. Solutions include an emphasis on the realities of truck drivers' work and compensation – not just logged hours – and upping the insurance requirements for semi-trucks.

Key facts:

- 3,757 people died in trucking accidents in the U.S. in 2011.
- More than 28,000 trucking companies with safety violations operate on U.S. roads.
- Nearly three times as many people die in truck accidents as die in aviation, boating, and railroad accidents combined.
- In a fatal two-vehicle crash involving vehicle and a large truck, 97 percent of the deaths were in the passenger vehicle.

Many thanks to Jennifer Fuson for her summary of the report on the AAJ website,
www.justice.org.

Nothing in this article should be construed as legal advice. You must consult with an attorney for the application of the law to your specific circumstances.

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