

MAA Inquiry

A spate of truck 'horror stories' has been reported in the media in recent weeks. As always, they missed the mark and failed to identify the root causes or any solution.

After several weeks writing a submission to the recent NSW Motor Accident Authority Inquiry, I was fortunate enough to be able to present another side to the story at a public hearing in Brisbane.

Although there's not enough room here to go into detail, here is my analysis of the safety problems faced by the industry.

Firstly, it's appropriate to point out that not everyone in the transport industry is tarred with the same brush. Many operators out there, both individuals and companies, are doing a lot in terms of trying to promote a positive industry profile.

Education

There is a clear lack of education directed at customers to highlight

Chain stores ... predominantly schedule deliveries for the early hours of the morning – a known fatigue risk

the industry's services and the tremendous pressures customer demands place on transport carriers. The lack of knowledge extends to the implications of recent Chain of Responsibility laws. Everyone in the supply chain has a place to play in the safety equation.

Also, the general public (consumers) need to understand that fruit, vegetables and other products do not mysteriously appear on their plate each morning. At some time or another, trucks are responsible for delivering it to the table.

Customer Demands

Some (not all) customers are a significant contributing factor to workplace incidents, injuries and deaths. More often than not customers who contract transport services do not understand legislation governing safety, such as driving hour and duty

of care provisions. For example, customers may unnecessarily hold up a delivery because a particular grower has not finished picking and packing the product – putting pressure on the carrier to make up time.

Until a higher price is paid for safety by customers, transport will always be on the back foot. For safety to improve, there must be a clear link with industry viability.

Time Slots & Parking

Freight is controlled by individual markets, chain stores, etc, who predominantly schedule deliveries for the early hours of the morning – a known fatigue risk. The times are often non-negotiable. While freight services must be reactive to customers needs, there is a limit.

Is time slotting and booking systems an effective way to control incoming and outgoing freight? Not when you see the queues and delays inherent in the system. I believe there should be no time slots or restrictions imposed on interstate freight.

Once a driver arrives at the destination, there's usually no parking available. Just hours queuing in a line with no place to sleep. Appropriate parking and driver amenities should become a pre-requisite for all loading/unloading facilities.

Technology & E-Commerce

As technology becomes increasingly smarter, customers have looked to decrease stock levels. This means smaller loads delivered to more customers, more frequently. The additional pick-up and deliveries put extra pressure and stress on drivers.

Technology should be used to

assist drivers and companies; however I'm against its use, at this stage, for regulation until accuracy and other concerns can be overcome. I also believe individuals and companies should be able to access their own data on Safe-T-Cam via the internet on a secure server basis.

Legislated Driving Hours

Log book rules inevitably fail because of high competition and economic realities. Safety, therefore, depends on easing economic pressures. Driving hours need to reflect the realities of today's society through alternative compliance. Hours of driving is not the sole issue, rather the "whole package" of training, education and information.

Clearly it's time to change the industry's culture and image. Everyone needs to be brought into the loop and squeezed hard until the non compliant customers drop out of the loop.

Web surfers this month are treated to the following web sites:

<http://www.trucksonline.com.au/> – excellent search and education information; particularly extensive dangerous goods information, codes and customer information.

<http://www.whinger.com.au/> – Pay a small fee of around \$8.50 and they pursue your whinge with governments or whoever. A whole new meaning to "doing something about it!"

The winner of the free web page (see last issue) will be announced in the November issue of *Truck Australia*. Until next month – Stay Safe.

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