



Statement of Peter Griskivich

Vice President Motor Vehicle Manufacturers Association of the U. S. Inc.
at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Public Meeting
on Heavy Truck Safety, Washington, D.C.

September 10, 1979

STATEMENT OF PETER GRISKIVICH, VICE PRESIDENT
MOTOR VEHICLE MANUFACTURERS ASSOCIATION OF THE U.S., INC.
AT THE NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION
PUBLIC MEETING ON HEAVY TRUCK SAFETY
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Introduction

Ms. Chairman and members of the Panel, my name is Peter Griskivich. I am Vice President for the Motor Truck Manufacturers Division of the Motor Vehicle Manufacturers Association of the U.S. (MVMA). MVMA is a trade association of domestic automobile, truck and bus manufacturers whose members produce over 99 percent of all domestic vehicles, including 90 percent of all medium and heavy duty trucks.*

MVMA appreciates the opportunity to offer comments at this public hearing because truck manufacturers have a vital interest in the efficient and safe operation of their products on the nation's highways. We share your hope that this kind of a public meeting will increase the knowledge and understanding of highway traffic accident problems and help point the way to reducing truck accidents and fatalities.

We believe it is beneficial to have the viewpoints of all those who are involved with commercial vehicles. Accordingly, as you begin this dialogue, it is our earnest hope that it not be

* MVMA members include: American Motors Corporation, Checker Motors Corporation, Chrysler Corporation, Ford Motor Company, Freightliner Corporation, General Motors Corporation, International Harvester Company, PACCAR Inc, The Nolan Company, Volkswagen of America, Inc., Walter Motor Truck Company and White Motor Corporation.

accidents. In-depth analyses of factors contributing to the recent upward trend in heavy truck accidents are lacking. Well intentioned conclusions about the heavy truck safety experience are coming from many quarters, with each group having a different perspective. For example:

- In testimony before the Senate Commerce Committee in support of his truck safety legislation in July, Senator Percy said: "Our roads are plagued with what appears to be an epidemic of unsafe trucks..." and cited DOT statistics that 17,578 (or nearly 35%) of the 50,000 highway fatalities in 1978 were "caused by" trucks and buses.

He then went on to say: "Heavy trucks alone were responsible for 11 percent of these fatal accidents, despite the fact that they account for less than 1 percent of vehicles on the road. This is a significant increase, for in 1975 heavy trucks were involved in only 7.8 percent of fatal accidents. While the number of vehicle miles traveled by heavy trucks rose 14 percent from 1975 to 1977, the number of these trucks involved in fatal accidents increased 29.3 percent."

These statistics, while pointing to the increased accident involvement of heavy trucks, unfortunately do not shed much light in pinpointing why the accidents

- On the other hand, the testimony of the Independent Truckers Association (ITA) cites an FHWA study of accidents on main rural highways related to speed, driver, and vehicle, showing that on four-lane highways the speed of 68 miles per hour was much safer than 55 miles per hour. The ITA suggests that violations of hours of service necessitated by lower speed limit explains the significant increase in accidents.*

The examples cited above illustrate the kinds of conflicting opinions often drawn from limited or fragmentary evidence.

Unfortunately, generalized statements do not identify the reasons for increasing heavy truck accidents and the problems which need to be solved. Superficial judgments, or intuitive guesses about the reasons for heavy truck accidents can lead to misinterpretations of the situation and are not likely to bring about an improvement in truck safety.

We simply don't know enough about the accident involvement of heavy trucks. We know it has been reported that fatalities have increased 40 percent between 1975 and 1978. We know the proportions involved between straight trucks and tractor/trailer

* MVMA strongly supports the 55 mph speed limit, not only as an energy conservation measure but because of its favorable effect on reducing the severity of traffic crashes.

Percent of Accidents Caused by Drivers of Interstate Trucks

- 37% were caused by the driver dozing, falling asleep, inattentive, or momentarily distracted.
- 13% were caused by excessive speed in good weather.
- 11% were caused by drinking or drugs.
- 10% were caused by traveling too fast in hazardous weather or low visibility.
- 7% were caused by poor judgment, unsafe maneuver, incapacitated, or inexperienced.
- 6% were caused by failure to downshift on steep downgrade.
- 3% were caused by miscellaneous action.

87% (347 accidents)

Percent of Accidents Caused by Mechanical Defects of Interstate Trucks

- 5% were caused by front tire blowouts.
- 3% were caused by wheel bearing, axle, spring, or steering failure.
- 2% were caused by trailer hitch or fifth wheel failures.
- 2% were caused by air brake deficiencies.
- 1% had miscellaneous causes.

13% (51 accidents)

TOTAL 100% (398 accidents) initiated by trucks

necessarily mean that it was an unsafe truck or that the driver was at fault.

We recognize that the information regarding heavy tractor/trailer combinations is far from definitive and because of this there is need for caution in interpreting the analysis of available accident statistical information. Our information and analysis of available data fails to establish heavy trucks as grossly disproportionate contributors to the incidence of death and injury in motor vehicle transportation. As in all societal systems, however, there is room for improvement.

Our Association -- the Motor Vehicle Manufacturers Association -- is dedicated to working for a better understanding of the role motor trucks and buses play in our daily lives and the critically important contributions they make to our nation's economy. The Association sponsors basic research concerning their use and over the years has supported efforts aimed at developing the bases for safer, more reliable, more efficient and more effective motor truck transportation with minimal environmental impact.

A large portion of our motor vehicle research program, conducted largely through grants and contracts, has been directed toward a better definition of the traffic safety problem, and better understanding of those factors which cause accidents and injuries on the highway. The objective has been to expand

oral statement summarizes the key findings from our recent research projects and identifies pertinent current projects.

This is what we found:

- detailed accident data are lacking, the description of vehicles involved is inadequate;
- often investigation reveals a small truck, e.g., a pickup truck has been categorized with heavy trucks;
- police reporting is incomplete and inconsistent;
- no general body of data exists to support the allegation that heavy trucks are over-involved in highway accidents;
- there is a need to concentrate on how to avoid accidents because an accident involving a heavy truck can be catastrophic, and whether a truck is a cab-over or conventional makes little difference.

Research we have sponsored at HSRI has led to the important finding that making the truck/trailer more easily recognizable -- more conspicuous -- holds out greater promise for preventing car into truck accidents, particularly those involving underride.

We find existing exposure data imprecise. Data in far greater accuracy and detail that is currently available are required to put the accident picture in perspective. Exposure data on vehicle miles traveled needs to be collected by vehicle configuration, highway type, location, time of day, etc. at a minimum. This data must be closely linked with, or derived

We further suggest that NHTSA and BMCS undertake a comprehensive heavy truck safety analysis which brings together and evaluates the great body of existing fragmentary data and identifies and fills gaps which exist. We find these gaps to be in three principal areas:

- Lack of adequate numbers of detailed heavy truck accident investigation data;
- A lack of corresponding exposure data; and
- An evaluation of whether there is a relationship between driver health and comfort and the degree of safety with which he or she operates the vehicle.

Adequate samples of detailed accident data will provide a basis for identifying causative factors and potential countermeasures. Corresponding exposure data will put the heavy truck safety issues in perspective and identify high frequency accident situations, whether caused by road, vehicle, driver or environmental factors which need attention. Finally, an identification of the driver's health and safety needs (whether in terms of space, temperature, air quality vibration or other factors) will provide a benchmark for continuing industry efforts to enhance the driver's environment.

The truck manufacturing industry is confident that by a cooperative effort with those who use its products and with those in Government who regulate them, a productive effort can be mounted aimed at reducing truck accident involvement. But