

Seat Belt Solutions

DOUG CONDRA • PRESIDENT

Seat belts are catching on with truck drivers ... sort of. The latest Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration report indicates 65 percent of them are now belting up. That's better than five years ago, when the number was 48 percent, but it's still nowhere near the car driver rate of 82 percent.

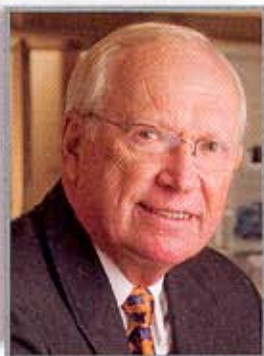
The sobering facts remain: Of 805 truck occupants killed in 2006 crashes, 393 were not wearing belts. More than 80 percent of the 217 who died after being ejected from their cabs were not belted in. Another stat: More than half of truck occupant fatalities involve rollovers, where an unbelted driver is four times more likely to die than one wearing a belt.

It's easy to label drivers who don't use belts as disbelieving hardheads. But they have some valid reasons, as evidenced by results of the FMCSA study, conducted by the Transportation Research Board.

Two recurring themes came from driver interviews: (1) ill-fitting belts tend to rub or vibrate against the neck or shoulder; (2) belts with aggressive retraction mechanisms restrict drivers from operating controls. These problems are especially prevalent in big-bodied drivers.

Other reasons for not buckling up included inconvenience, forgetfulness, not in the habit, disbelief that belts work, and that old standby: It violates personal rights.

The personal rights advocates aren't likely to change anytime soon. For the others,



Using simple tools can soften driver opposition to buckling up.

there are tools available – at little or no cost – to help make them comfortable with seat belts. These tools aren't brand new, but it doesn't look like they've sparked the attention they deserve among truck operators.

Virtually all truck builders offer belt systems featuring the Komfort Latch, with which the driver adjusts belt tension to fit his or her body. It lessens abrasive contact and gives the person more range of movement than older systems. It's standard on some truck models and optional on most others.

A slick new version of the latch, the Sliding Komfort Latch, automates the process of relieving belt tension and freeing driver movement. It's now optional on Sterling, and is the likely successor to the

original Komfort Latch on other makes. You can view a video at www.lifeguardtechnologies.com/cts/sliding.html.

Another option available on most heavy trucks is the high-visibility belt, in bright orange or neon green. Its purpose is to create a mindset among drivers that the company cares about safety, while making it easy for management or inspectors to monitor belt use.

Both products are proven to work, but hesitant drivers still need to accept them. That leads to another tool: training. No problem; it's free from IMMI, the Indiana company that supplies virtually all heavy truck seat belt systems in the U.S. You can get a training kit at www.clicktugsnug.com or by calling 866-765-5835.

The FMCSA research concludes that increasing truck driver seat belt use to the automobile driver level of 82 percent would prevent 74 trucker deaths per year. Doesn't that justify a little more attention?

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High-visibility belt, in orange or neon green, shows drivers the fleet is serious about safety and makes belt use monitoring easy. New Sliding Komfort Latch (inset) automates belt tensioning according to the driver's body with a flip of a switch. Now optional with Sterling, it's expected to eventually replace the manual Komfort Latch on all makes.