



## Training notes from the woods & the classroom

February 2011

---

### U.S. to Weigh Speed Limiters

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said it will abide by trucking industry requests and formally consider a proposed rule to require manufacturers to install devices to limit heavy trucks to 68 miles per hour, possibly as soon as 2012. In a Federal Register posting last week, NHTSA said it was granting two similar petitions by American Trucking Associations, Road Safe America and nine motor carriers requesting the rule as a way to reduce speed-related crashes involving trucks.

NHTSA said two studies have indicated there is a "potential for speed limiting devices to decrease crash severity." but the agency said that granting the ATA and Road Safe America petitions "does not mean that a final rule will be issued." ATA filed its petition in October 2006 to both NHTSA and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. "We're obviously pleased that they have indicated a willingness to look at doing a rulemaking," said ATA President Bill Graves. "We certainly would have appreciated a quicker action on the petition. We're slightly disappointed that they're not going to initiate this action until 2012."

When he asked NHTSA to act in 2006, Graves said, "For the sake of safety, there is a need to slow down all traffic. The trucking industry is trying to do its part with this initiative.

NHTSA acknowledged that research already suggests that cutting truck speeds could be a positive development, but the agency said it was still withholding judgment until it receives a study from FMCSA on the economic benefits of using limiters. That study could be made public within 90 days, according to an FMCSA spokesman. NHTSA said it has received more than 3,800 comments since 2007, but an agency spokesman declined further comment on the proposal.

Ted Scott, ATA's director of special projects, said he was pleased with the NHTSA announcement. "It will help fuel efficiency if you're going faster than 68 mph." Scott said, "but it's a safety issue far more than a fuel-efficiency issue. Speed is a major contributor to truck accidents." Steve Owings, president of Road Safe America, a road-safety advocacy group, said speed-limiter regulations in Europe and Australia have cut heavy truck-involved crashes by more than 20%. "The U.S. is the only industrialized country on Earth without a rule already," Owings told Transport Topics. While limiting the speed of trucks to 68 mph has gained widespread industry support, the idea still is opposed by some fleets and owner operators, who claim that it will decrease productivity.

Cutting truck speeds "will not improve highway safety," Todd Spencer, executive vice president of the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association, said in a statement. "All credible highway research shows that highways are safest when all vehicles travel at the same speed and

that different speeds for cars and trucks actually increase the likelihood of accidents." However; Don Osterberg, Schneider National Inc. senior vice president of safety and driver training, said there is compelling evidence that trucks actually become more productive and safer at lower speeds. Schneider, based in Green Bay, Wis., has used governors since 1996. The carrier, one of the NHTSA co-petitioners with Road Safe America, has found that cutting speeds not only saves lives but also cuts fuel consumption and reduces its carbon footprint, Osterberg said. Schneider ranks No. 9 on the TRANSPORT TOPICS 100 list of the largest U.S. and Canadian for-hire carriers.

Its internal crash data show that vehicles without speed limiters accounted for more than 40% of the company's serious collisions, while driving only 17% of the carriers total miles. "And years ago we increased our speed limiters from 55 mph to 65 mph and looked at the corresponding productivity, and we saw no measurable change in productivity Osterberg told TT'. "We did see an increase in crash rates." "I know there are a lot of people in the industry' who disagree with me and believe that speed enhances productivity," Osterberg said, "I know it's a counterintuitive view but I've looked at the data."

Speed limiters have gained wide acceptance in the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec, which for the past two years have required most truckers to cap their speed at 105 kilometers per hour, or just over 65 mph, Doug Switzer, a spokesman for the Ontario Trucking Association, told TT. Switzer said that, although the effects of limiters on the number or severity of accidents have not yet been analyzed, gloomy predictions that slower trucks would cause highway congestion, a U.S. trucker boycott and a spike in the number of accidents, have not come true.

"The reality is [that] none of the horror stories about the use of speed limiters have come to pass," Switzer said. "Basically, I would say it's been a great success here."

But Kevin Burch, president of Jet Express Inc., Dayton, Ohio, and also a co-petitioner, said that speed-limit increases in some states have put pressure on carriers to allow their contract drivers to increase their speeds. About 70% of Jet Express' trucks are driven by independent owner operators, he said.

Drive Safe!

Paul Schultz, Schultz Equipment & Parts Co., Inc.  
Iron Mountain & Escanaba, MI 49801  
(906) 774-8900, [www.schultzequipment.com](http://www.schultzequipment.com)

(Content courtesy of the Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association – February 2011– *Great Lakes TPA Magazine*)

---

Minnesota Logger Education Program  
Dave Chura, Executive Director  
301 W 1<sup>st</sup> Street; Suite 510  
Duluth, MN 55802  
218-722-5442 · [dchura@mllep.org](mailto:dchura@mllep.org) · [www.mllep.org](http://www.mllep.org)

