

Fatalities and Injuries Among Truck and Taxicab Drivers

BY ANDREW T. KNESTAUT

Taxicab drivers transport thousands of people every day, and truckdrivers move much of the goods we buy and sell. Business and daily life would be difficult without them.

Workers who drive for a living must deal with bad roads, traffic jams, and long hours. Truckdrivers and taxicab drivers face the possibility of serious injury and death from highway traffic incidents and assaults. Between 1992-95, almost 3,000 truckdrivers, and more than 400 taxicab drivers lost their lives while working.

From 1992-95, truckdriving had the most fatalities¹ of all occupations, accounting for 12 percent of all worker deaths. About two-thirds of the fatally injured truckers were involved in highway crashes. Truckdrivers also had more nonfatal injuries (over 151,000) than workers in any other occupation in 1995². Half of the nonfatal injuries were serious sprains and strains; this may be attributed to the fact that many truckdrivers must unload the goods they transport. (Tables 1 and 2 show other characteristics of truckdriver fatalities and nonfatal injuries.³)

Deadly assaults claim the lives of more taxicab drivers than any other fatal events. From 1992-95, over three-quarters of fatally injured cabdrivers were victims of homicide. In contrast, just one-tenth of the fatally injured drivers were involved in vehicle collisions. Taxicab drivers had relatively few nonfatal injuries—about 1,300 in 1995; only 3 percent were due to nonfatal assaults. These figures suggest that cabdrivers would have relatively safe jobs if deadly violence did not affect their work environments. (Tables 2 and 3 show other characteristics of taxicab driver fatalities and nonfatal injuries.)

Taxicab driver homicides

Cabdrivers had the highest homicide rate—32 homicides per 100,000—among the occupations most affected by

deadly violence. This rate is four times more than that of police officers. Robbery appeared to be the motive in many cases. About half of the murders occurred between 8 p.m. and 4 a.m. Half of the murdered taxicab drivers had head injuries, most from gunfire. Table 4 shows the occupations with the highest rates of homicide.

All workers in occupations listed in table 4 are affected in some manner by theft. Several factors help to explain why taxicab drivers are frequent victims of this crime: They work alone, frequently at night, and handle cash. In addition, taxicab drivers tend to work in areas, such as inner cities, with higher crime rates.

High crime areas also have higher incidences of violent crime, which may explain why taxicab drivers are not only robbed, but murdered as well. For example, all 35 cab drivers fatally injured in the Bronx, New York, between 1992-95 were victims of homicide. As noted above, cabdrivers had few nonfatal injuries, and very few of these were due to assaults. This suggests two situational extremes when cabdrivers were robbed or assaulted: (1) Drivers were not physically harmed, or (2) drivers were fatally injured. Further analysis of the factors behind these deadly assaults is not within the scope of this study because they are linked to the prevalence of violent crime in general.

Deadly violence affected cabdrivers in a variety of situations. In some instances, taxicab drivers were robbed and killed after responding to “setup” requests for taxis. Several cabdrivers were killed during disputes with customers, or when minor traffic incidents incited the persons involved to commit acts of violence. Still other drivers were killed by gunfire exchanged between other persons.

Injuries and fatalities of truckdrivers

Several factors contribute to fatal highway crashes of truckdrivers, including: Type of truck driven, vehicle maintenance, and weather conditions. Two-thirds of the truckdrivers fatally injured in highway crashes were behind

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the wheel of a tractor-trailer truck. Brake failure was reported as a factor in about two dozen of the incidents, and bad weather was involved in another dozen.

Driver fatigue may be another cause of highway crashes involving truckdrivers. Driving can be an exhausting activity, especially in heavy traffic or bad weather. A third of the fatal highway incidents occurred between 12 a.m. and 8 a.m., when the need for rest may be greatest. But almost half occurred during standard work hours, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. "Asleep at the wheel" is mentioned as a suspected factor in only 4 percent of the trucker highway fatality cases. It may be, however, that fatigue is a factor in more crashes, but it is neither suspected, nor recorded in some instances.

Although it may be expected that more fatal collisions between trucks and trains occur at night, just under three-quarters of the 94 collisions occurred during daytime hours, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. (See table 1.) Over 200 truckdrivers were fatally struck by vehicles while out of their trucks; half of these occurred during hours of twilight or darkness, 4 p.m. to 8 a.m. Yet, almost half were fatally struck during the day. Table 5 shows the activities of dismounted truckdrivers when they were struck by vehicles and fatally injured.

As noted in table 2, half of the nonfatal truckdriver injuries in 1995 were serious sprains and strains, which again

may be related to the fact truckdrivers often unload their own truck. The sprains and strains were likely the result of overexertion during unloading, and when drivers were struck by the objects they were moving. The back was the part of body affected in over a quarter of the truck drivers' nonfatal injury cases.

An underlying factor explaining these injuries may be the sedentary nature of truckdriving. Truckdrivers spend many hours behind a steering wheel. Tight delivery schedules may mean drivers have little time to waste at delivery sites, so they move heavy items immediately upon arrival to save time. Strenuous activity after hours of sitting, without time to stretch stiff muscles, may help explain why drivers sustain these injuries.

In addition, some truckdrivers may not be aware of proper lifting techniques, or the benefits of wearing back support gear. Some drivers may be provided with lifting equipment, but need additional or improved training in the proper use of it. Doubtless, however, despite the use of proper lifting techniques and equipment, injuries will still occur.

Truckdrivers and taxicab drivers make significant contributions to the national economy. Almost 3 million persons worked as truckdrivers, and over 200,000 persons drove taxicabs in 1995.

—ENDNOTES—

¹ The fatal work injury data were compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI). This program, which has collected occupational fatality data nationwide since 1992, uses diverse data sources to identify, verify, and profile fatal work injuries. Information about each workplace fatality (occupation and other worker characteristics, equipment being used, and circumstances of the event) is obtained by cross-referencing source documents, such as death certificates, workers' compensation records, and reports to Federal and State agencies. This method assures counts are as complete and accurate as possible.

² The Bureau of Labor Statistics' Survey of Occupational Injuries and

Illnesses (SOII) produced the nonfatal injury estimates. This program collects information from a random sample of about 250,000 establishments representing most of private industry. Worker characteristics are collected only for those workers sustaining injuries and illnesses requiring days away from work to recuperate.

³ Comparison of fatal and nonfatal data is problematic, because the scope and methodology of CFOI and SOII are different. CFOI fatality data presented in this study are for 1992-95, and SOII nonfatal injury data are for 1995. For more information on CFOI or SOII, access the Internet at www.bls.gov/oshhome.htm, or email cfoistaff@bls.gov

Table 1. Job-related fatalities of truck drivers by selected characteristics, 1992-95

	Number	Percent		Number	Percent
Total	2,953	100	Total	2,953	100
Year			Time of incident		
1992	699	24	12am-3:59am	311	11
1993	739	25	4am-7:59am	486	16
1994	766	26	8am-11:59am	708	24
1995	749	25	12pm-3:59pm	710	24
Employee status			Industry		
Wage and salary workers	2,696	91	4pm-7:59pm	363	12
Self-employed	257	9	8pm-12am	240	8
Gender			Unspecified		
Men	2,870	97	Private industry	2,908	98
Women	83	3	Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	56	2
Age¹			Mining		
16 to 19 years	36	1	Oil and gas extraction	68	2
20 to 24 years	168	6	Construction	37	1
25 to 34 years	674	23	Heavy construction, except building	152	5
35 to 44 years	802	27	Highway and street construction	73	2
45 to 54 years	711	24	Special trade contractors	48	2
55 to 64 years	436	15	Manufacturing	60	2
65 years and over	122	4	Food and kindred products	281	10
Race			Lumber and wood products		
White	2,489	84	Logging	55	2
Black	342	12	Stone, clay, and glass products	86	3
Asian or Pacific Islander	23	1	Concrete, gypsum, and plaster products	57	2
Other or unspecified	99	3	Transportation and public utilities	53	2
Hispanic origin			Wholesale trade		
Hispanic	218	7	Wholesale trade, durable goods	45	2
Event or exposure			Wholesale trade, nondurable goods		
Contact with objects and equipment	251	8	Groceries and related products	59	2
Struck by object	156	5	Petroleum and petroleum products	42	1
Caught in or compressed by equipment or objects	75	3	Retail trade	177	6
Falls	72	2	Eating and drinking places	41	1
Fall from nonmoving vehicle	31	1	Services	155	5
Exposure to harmful substances or environments	93	3	Business services	73	2
Contact with overhead power lines	43	1	Auto repair, services, and parking	59	2
Transportation incidents	2,361	80	Automotive services, except repair	45	2
Highway incident	1,893	64	Other or unspecified	55	2
Collision between vehicles, mobile equipment	692	23	Government	45	2
Moving in same direction	166	6	State² and county		
Moving in opposite directions, oncoming	231	8	California	325	11
Moving in intersection	78	3	Los Angeles	60	2
Moving/standing vehicle, equipment—			San Bernardino	40	1
in roadway	49	2	Texas	261	9
Vehicle struck object or equipment in roadway	52	2	Florida	148	5
Vehicle struck object, equipment on side of road	389	13	Pennsylvania	120	4
Noncollision incident	670	23	Georgia	119	4
Jack-knifed or overturned—no collision	498	17	North Carolina	107	4
Ran off highway—no collision	130	4	Ohio	106	4
Nonhighway incident, except rail, air, water	120	4	Mississippi	96	3
Overturned	46	2	Indiana	94	3
Worker struck by vehicle, mobile equipment	234	8	Illinois	88	3
Worker struck by vehicle, equipment in roadway	69	2	Alabama	82	3
Worker struck by vehicle, equip. on side of road	62	2	Virginia	73	2
Worker struck in parking lot or non-road area	91	3	Tennessee	67	2
Railway incident	94	3	Arkansas	65	2
Fires and explosions	30	1	Kentucky	61	2
Assaults and violent acts	126	4	Missouri	61	2
Homicides	96	3	Michigan	60	2
Suicides	30	1	Oregon	59	2
Other or unspecified	20	1	Louisiana	57	2
			New Jersey	57	2
			Wisconsin	56	2
			Washington	55	2
			New York	54	2
			Oklahoma	54	2
			Other states	628	21

¹ Ages for four of the fatally injured truck drivers were not determined.

² States with more than 50 truck driver fatalities.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 1992-95.

NOTE: Totals for major categories may include subcategories not shown separately. Percentages may not add to totals because of rounding.

Table 2. Job-related nonfatal injuries and illnesses involving days away from work of truck and taxicab drivers by selected characteristics, 1995

Characteristic	Truck drivers		Taxicab drivers	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	151,338	100	1,328	100
Nature				
Sprains, strains	78,360	52	795	60
Fractures	11,017	7	63	5
Cuts, punctures	7,035	5	—	—
Bruises	14,499	10	132	10
Multiple traumatic injuries and disorders	6,914	5	14	1
Back pain and pain, except back	9,829	6	41	3
Back pain, hurt back only	4,013	3	16	1
All other natures	23,684	16	283	21
Part of body				
Head	7,886	5	57	4
Eyes	2,559	2	—	—
Neck	5,128	3	89	7
Trunk	63,409	42	446	34
Back	42,102	28	322	24
Shoulder	8,962	6	83	6
Upper extremities	19,718	13	183	14
Finger	5,695	4	15	1
Hand	3,107	2	37	3
Wrist	3,480	2	62	5
Lower extremities	37,331	25	255	19
Knee	14,003	9	57	4
Foot, toe	6,919	5	37	3
Multiple body parts	16,035	11	238	18
All other body parts	1,831	1	60	5
Event or exposure				
Contact with objects and equipment	30,396	20	77	6
Struck against object	7,616	5	—	—
Struck by object	15,635	10	36	3
Caught in or compressed by equipment or objects	4,412	3	—	—
Fall to lower level	13,791	9	74	6
Fall on same level	15,564	10	75	6
Slips or trips without fall	5,979	4	—	—
Overexertion	43,605	29	443	33
Overexertion in lifting	26,232	17	279	21
Repetitive motion	1,059	1	—	—
Exposure to harmful substances or environments	1,706	1	16	1
Transportation incidents	18,474	12	522	39
Assaults and violent acts by persons	—	—	36	3
All other events	20,764	13	85	6
Age				
16 to 19 years	1,064	1	—	—
20 to 24 years	11,046	7	45	3
25 to 34 years	47,953	32	370	28
35 to 44 years	46,479	31	442	33
45 to 54 years	30,281	20	315	24
55 to 64 years	11,379	8	100	8
65 years and over	1,070	1	39	3
Not reported	2,066	1	17	1
Race / Hispanic origin				
White	88,438	58	582	44
Black	14,438	10	150	11
Other race or not reported	38,608	26	465	35
Hispanic	9,854	7	131	10
Gender				
Men	141,101	93	1,104	83
Women	9,657	6	225	17

NOTE: Dashes indicate less than .05 percent or data that do not meet publication guidelines. Totals for major categories may include subcategories not shown separately. Figures may

not add to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses, 1995

Table 3. Job-related fatalities of taxicab drivers by selected characteristics, 1992-95

	Number	Percent		Number	Percent
Total	431	100	Total	431	100
Year			Time of incident		
1992	106	25	12am-3:59am	92	21
1993	113	26	4am-7:59am	58	13
1994	113	26	8am-11:59am	31	7
1995	99	23	12pm-3:59pm	38	9
			4pm-7:59pm	41	10
Employee status			8pm-12am	91	21
Wage and salary workers	350	81	Unspecified	80	19
Self-employed	81	19			
Gender			Location		
Men	413	96	Home	6	1
Women	18	4	Street and highway	355	82
			Interstate, freeway, or expressway	19	4
Age			Other state or U.S. highway	9	2
18 to 24 years	14	3	Local road or street	123	29
25 to 34 years	116	27	Public building	6	1
35 to 44 years	160	37	Other or unspecified	64	15
45 to 54 years	82	19	Parking lot, garage (except employer's premises)	24	6
55 to 64 years	28	6			
65 years and over	31	7	State¹ and area		
Race			New York	141	33
White	203	47	Kings	38	9
Black	157	36	Bronx	35	8
Asian or Pacific Islander	34	8	Queens	30	7
Other or unspecified	37	9	New York	23	5
			Florida	34	8
Hispanic origin			Dade	7	2
Hispanic	58	13	Palm Beach	5	1
			Martin	4	1
Event or exposure			California	27	6
Contact with objects and equipment	6	1	Los Angeles	10	2
Struck by object	4	1	San Francisco	4	1
Transportation incidents	78	18	Georgia	21	5
Highway incident	63	15	Fulton	7	2
Collision between vehicles, mobile equipment	44	10	DeKalb	6	1
Moving in same direction	8	2	Texas	21	5
Moving in opposite directions, oncoming	10	2	Harris	7	2
Moving in intersection	6	1	Illinois	13	3
Moving/standing vehicle, equip.—in roadway	7	2	Cook	11	3
Vehicle struck object, equipment on side of road	9	2	New Jersey	13	3
Noncollision incident	4	1	Essex	6	1
Jack-knifed or overturned—no collision	4	1	North Carolina	13	3
Nonhighway incident, except rail, air, water	4	1	Pennsylvania	13	3
Worker struck by vehicle, mobile equipment	11	3	Philadelphia	4	1
Worker struck by vehicle, equipment in roadway	6	1	Arizona	11	3
Worker struck by vehicle, equip. on side of road	5	1	Maricopa	9	2
Assaults and violent acts	342	79	Maryland	11	3
Homicides	338	78	Prince George's	5	1
Hitting, kicking, beating	11	3	Indiana	10	2
Shooting	301	70	Marion	6	1
Stabbing	17	4	Michigan	10	2
Other events or exposures	5	1	Other states	93	22

¹ States with 10 or more job-related taxicab driver fatalities.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 1992-95.

NOTE: Totals for major categories may include subcategories not shown separately. Percentages may not add to totals because of rounding.

Table 4. Occupations with the highest rates¹ of job-related homicide, 1995

Occupation	Number of fatalities		Employed (000s)	Homicides per 100,000 workers
	Total	Homicides		
Total	6,210	1,024	126,248	1
Taxicab drivers	99	69	213	32
Policemen	174	81	1,051	8
Security guards	101	59	899	7
Food and lodging managers	58	46	1,276	4
Cashiers	116	107	2,727	4
Sales supervisors, proprietors	212	133	4,480	3

¹ The rate of job-related homicide per 100,000 workers was calculated as follows:

$(N / W) \times 100,000$; N = the number of job-related homicide victims, 16 years of age and older; W = the number of employed workers. The employed worker figures used in

the rate calculations were annual average estimates of employed civilians, 16 years of age and older, from the Current Population Survey, 1995. These employment-based rates measure the incidence of job-related homicide for all workers in an occupation regardless of exposure time.

Table 5. Activity of dismantled truck drivers when struck by vehicle, 1992-95

Activity	Number	Percent
Total	234	100
Truck transport operations	117	50
Entering, exiting truck	14	6
Directing, flagging traffic	14	6
Walking near truck	68	29
Crossing street	16	7
Walking behind truck	16	7
Truck maintenance	23	10
Loading, unloading truck	19	8
Other activity	59	25
Unspecified activity	16	7

NOTE: Totals for major categories may include subcategories not shown separately.

