

FACE THE FACTS HAZ ALERT

To prevent truck crashes due to substance use:

- Employers should implement and enforce a policy that prohibits commercial drivers who are ill or taking over-the-counter medications with potential side effects for impaired driving from operating a commercial vehicle.
- Employers should implement and enforce a “reasonable suspicion” drug testing policy if a driver is suspected to be under the influence of drugs.
- Companies should conduct comprehensive new-hire prescreening and after-hire random drug testing for substance abuse.
- A nationwide database containing a record of all commercial driver positive drug tests in the last two years should be developed.

Truck Drivers in Fatal Crashes After Substance Use

In Kentucky in 2007, preliminary numbers indicate that at least twenty-nine drivers were killed in occupational motor vehicle collisions.

Following are case descriptions for two Kentucky drivers who were killed in crashes after using substances while driving:

Case 1: A 31-year-old male truck driver died when his semi-tractor trailer left the roadway and rolled into a ditch. The driver was on a straight stretch of road. His right tires left the pavement into a grassy area on the side of the road. The driver attempted to correct the vehicle, but was unable to do so, then hit a tree and rolled over. The driver, who was not wearing a seat belt was declared dead at the scene. Toxicology results showed the presence of chemicals found in over the counter cough and flu medications. When used together, these substances have a dramatic depressive effect on the central nervous system.



Case 2: A 47-year-old male truck driver was killed after crashing his tractor and refrigerated trailer. The driver had exited the interstate and attempted to turn right at the end of the ramp. He missed the turn and drove straight across a four-lane highway, going through a guardrail, becoming airborne, and crashing into an embankment, immediately bursting into flames. The truck driver was pronounced dead at the scene by the coroner. Toxicology results showed the presence of cocaine, benzodiazepine (active ingredient in Valium), and a carbon monoxide level of 38% at the time of the crash.

DRIVERS WHO ARE ILL OR UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF SUBSTANCES SHOULD BE PROHIBITED FROM OPERATING A COMMERCIAL VEHICLE.

EMPLOYERS SHOULD IMPLEMENT AND ENFORCE A POLICY THAT PROHIBITS COMMERCIAL DRIVERS WHO ARE ILL OR TAKING OVER-THE-COUNTER MEDICATION FROM OPERATING A COMMERCIAL VEHICLE.

Many common medications, including those used to treat cough and cold symptoms, can have side effects that can affect a driver's ability. These include drowsiness, impaired decision making abilities, dizziness, blurred vision, and even hypnosis and hallucinations.

In addition, truck drivers should adhere to FMCSA regulations pertaining to illness and fatigue. 49 CFR §392.3 states that no driver shall operate a commercial motor vehicle, and a motor carrier shall not require or permit a driver to operate a commercial motor vehicle, while the driver's ability or alertness is impaired, or so likely to become impaired, through fatigue, illness, or any other cause, as to make it unsafe for him/her to begin or continue to operate the commercial motor vehicle.

EMPLOYERS SHOULD IMPLEMENT AND ENFORCE A "REASONABLE SUSPICION" DRUG TESTING POLICY IF A DRIVER IS SUSPECTED TO BE UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF DRUGS.

49 CFR §382.307 (a and b) state that an employer who suspects that a driver is engaged in substance abuse is required to have that driver undergo drug testing. Fleet supervisors should be trained to recognize signs of employee substance abuse and receive company authorization to have a driver submit to reasonable suspicion drug testing if he/she exhibits symptoms of substance abuse.

A NATIONWIDE DATABASE CONTAINING A RECORD OF ALL COMMERCIAL DRIVER POSITIVE DRUG TESTS IN THE LAST TWO YEARS SHOULD BE DEVELOPED.

In 2006, North Carolina instituted a law which requires employers to report all positive drug tests of CDL drivers to the state's Division of Motor Vehicles. Those results are kept on record for two years. When performing background checks on potential drivers, employers can see if a driver has had a positive test in the last two years. The U.S Government Accountability Office has recommended that the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration should develop a similar, nationwide, database.

References:

- 1. Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, Website address: <http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/rules-regulations/rules-regulations.htm>**
- 2. Kentucky FACE program, Case Report #05ky008 - "Male semi-truck driver killed in rollover crash on county road," and Case Report #05ky074- "Long haul trucker dies after striking an embankment at the end of an interstate highway off-ramp."**
- 3. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, "Drugs and human performance fact sheets: Dextromethorphan and Diazepam. Website address: <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/research/job185drugs/index.htm>**
- 4. U.S. Government Accountability Office, GAO-08-600- "Motor Carrier Safety- Improvements to drug testing programs could better identify illegal drug users and keep them off the road."**

For more information, contact:

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