

## **Kentucky Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Program**

**Incident Number: 11KY072**

**Release Date: August 13, 2012**

**Subject: Owner/ Operator Hauling Asphalt Flux Dies After Driving into a Ravine and Striking Trees**

### **Summary**

In the early morning of a late summer's day, a 50 year old semi-truck driver was transporting a load of asphalt flux. He had been driving for approximately five hours and was getting ready to exit the interstate when for an unknown reason, the unit left the interstate, sideswiped a SUV parked on the shoulder, drove through a guardrail then proceeded into a ravine. A passing motorist called emergency services, who upon their arrival contacted the local coroner. The driver had been ejected from the cab and was pronounced dead at the scene.

To prevent future occurrences of similar incidents, the following recommendations have been made:

### **Recommendations and Discussions**

**Recommendation No. 1: Companies should provide new and refresher commercial driver safety training for company drivers that addresses driver distraction and includes defensive driving techniques.**

Company truck drivers should receive new and refresher commercial driver training semiannually. This training should include defensive driving techniques and highway incident management strategies. Training should also include education on the prevention of jackknife, roll-overs and the causes of such occurrences. According to two truck driver training schools, defensive driving techniques should include looking eight to ten seconds ahead of the truck and how to deal with obstacles in the roadway (05KY089). Training should also include aids to help drivers stay focused on driving and not become distracted. Companies should provide refresher training for all drivers to address driving habits including appropriate speed for driving conditions, wearing safety belts, space management, and how to avoid becoming distracted while driving and fatigued.

**Recommendation No. 2: Vehicle stabilizer and sensory systems should be mandatory equipment on all commercial vehicles.**

To reduce roll-overs, jackknives, fishtails, and other dangerous vehicle maneuvers, fleet owners and owner-operators should consider equipping all semi tractor-trailers with vehicle stabilizer and sensory systems. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's Code of Federal Regulations, 393.55 requires commercial vehicles manufactured after 1999 to be equipped with automatic braking systems (ABS). The semi-tractor trailer involved in this incident had been manufactured in 2003 and was equipped with an ABS, but not a stabilizer system. When ABS is

applied by the driver prior to striking or making an avoidance maneuver, the electronic stability program when coupled with ABS helps prevent the semi-tractor trailer from jackknifing. If the ABS is not activated quickly enough, the electronic stability program can sense incorrect vehicle movement. Independent of driver input or action, the electronic stability program will override the driver, engage, and prevent the semi-tractor trailer from jackknifing or rolling-over.

Another system available for trucks is a sensory system which uses forward and side-sensing radar to inform the driver that he/she is too close to the vehicle in front of them or to their immediate side. Two indicators, a light on the dash board and an audio signal, will alert the driver of close proximity to the vehicle in front or side and will automatically slow the truck down thus expanding the driver's reaction time.

**Recommendation No. 3: Semi tractor-trailer drivers should be trained to recognize signs of fatigue and drowsiness and when to seek appropriate rest areas.**

Fatigue is one of the main occupational hazards commercial drivers face. Commercial drivers should be educated to recognize signs of fatigue while driving. According to an article, "Driver Fatigue: The Dangers of Driving Sleepy", signs of driver fatigue include daydreaming, straying out of the lane, excessive yawning, feeling impatient and/or stiff, heavy eyes, and reacting slowly. Methods to avoid driver fatigue include being well rested, getting enough sleep, taking breaks every two hours where the driver may take a nap, eat a snack, avoiding consumption of alcohol, having a driving plan, and staying hydrated.

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Photograph of tanker hauling asphalt flux involved in this incident. Property of KY FACE.