



## [Trends in Big Rig and Other Truck Accident Injuries and Fatalities](#)

by [John Demas](#) on 12/08/09 at 3:33 pm

Most drivers concentrate on improving safety skills tied to navigating around on their local streets and roads. However, far more time should be spent honing skills needed for running even brief errands on local (or interstate) highways. Big rigs and other large trucks pose special dangers to all drivers since their heavy weight can make accidents more deadly, their large “blind” spots can make it hard to see smaller vehicles and they often carry dangerous (flammable) cargo.

On October 21, 2009, a big rig traveling in Stockton down the southbound lanes of Interstate 5 suddenly veered across the median and hit multiple cars in the northbound lanes. While the early reported accident injuries were minor, many victims of such accidents are far less fortunate.

According to the University of Michigan’s Traffic Research Institute’s Trucks Involved in Fatal Accidents Factbook (2006) regarding the years 2002 - 2006:

- An average of 5,200 large trucks were involved in fatal traffic accidents each year;
- California was one of the three states that reported the highest number of annual large truck accidents;
- There was an annual increase in the number of people killed in truck-related accidents between 2002 and 2006, rising from 5,314 in 2002 to 5,537 in 2006;
- The annual number of truck drivers killed in accidents during these same years increased from 664 to 784;
- Each year, an average of 363 pedestrians and 79 cyclists (including bicycles, unicycles and tricycles) are killed in traffic accidents involving trucks.
- Conventional large truck accidents, (See page 33), have increased significantly since the late 1980s. These involve the vehicles favored by most U. S. professional truck drivers who regularly haul large loads across the country. However, between 2002 and 2006, the number of accidents involving these vehicles stabilized a bit-although the overall numbers were still much higher than they were back in the late 1980s.

While the facts presented above involved rather general information, the following statistics provide more detailed data. These next facts address the specific types of truck drivers involved in the accidents, the weather conditions and the types of trucks involved in the accidents between 2002 and 2006 (See pages 31, 47 and 59):

- A bit surprisingly, about 84% of the accidents occurred on dry roads and about 87% of them took place on good weather (no precipitation) days;
- The majority of the collisions (about two-thirds) took place in rural areas during the day;
- October tends to be the most dangerous month and January tends to be the least dangerous (in terms of the average number of reported accidents);
- Eleven (11%) percent of the accidents were caused by a non-truck driver who crossed over the center line of the road and hit the truck head on;
- Looking only at fatal accidents: 30% occurred on state highways; about 25% on interstate highways and 23% on U. S. highways;
- As for the types of trucks involved in the fatal accidents, 74.2 % of them belonged to Class 8, which placed them in the heaviest Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR) class. The October 2009 accident referenced above was called a “big rig” collision - it probably involved a vehicle in one of the heavier classes;
- It should be noted that about 58% of these 2002 - 2006 statistics involved tractor-semitrailers;
- About 30.5% of all the trucks involved in these fatal accident statistics were straight trucks without trailers;
- Sixty-eight (68) of the tractor-semitrailers and 23 of the straight trucks involved in fatal accidents were carrying flammable liquids at the time of the collisions. (Fortunately, almost 30% of the trucks were empty);
- Over one-third (33%) of the trucks in these accidents were just handling local trips (within 50 miles of their base) at the time of the fatal collisions;
- At the time of their accidents, sixty percent (60%) of the truck drivers “had no driver factors recorded.”
- Less than three percent (3%) of the truck drivers involved in the fatal accidents had been drinking and less than two percent (2%) had been abusing drugs just prior to their truck-related deaths;
- As was the case in the Stockton big rig accident, the failure to keep driving in the proper lane is the most common factor involved in large truck accidents;
- Excessive speed (or speed inappropriate for the specific stretch of road) was the second most common factor involved in the fatal big truck accidents.

Review this type of information can help all of us since it makes us aware that many stereotypes involving big rig or large truck accidents are untrue or misleading. For instance, we are just as likely to be in an accident with a big rig on a bright sunny day as we are on a rainy day. However, the month of October frequently proves to be an unusually dangerous month for big truck accidents.

Those of us living and working in California should pay special attention to these statistics since our state regularly records some of the highest numbers of annual big rig accidents.

If you or someone you love has been harmed in a serious big truck accident, please feel free to contact us for a free assessment.