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## Congress Shouldn't Roll Back Safety; the Steps We've Taken Keep Tired Truckers off the Road

*Posted by Anne Ferro*

Improving safety and saving lives is at the heart of our mission at DOT. That's why we are committed to keeping tired truckers off the road--for their safety and the safety of others--through common sense rules backed by science, research, and data.

In 2012, thanks to our continued economic recovery and increased demand for freight shipping, there were nearly 10.7 million tractor-trailers and large trucks on the roads in the U.S., with the trucking industry experiencing unprecedented profitability this year.

But that demand has come with a price. Since 2009, we've seen an 18 percent increase in large truck crash fatalities. To put that in perspective, in one year alone, large trucks were involved in 317,000 traffic crashes resulting in an average of 75 deaths per week. That's *11 per day*.

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Fatigue is under-reported in crash accounts because drivers often don't want to admit to being at-fault or sleepy. However, we know that driver fatigue is a leading factor in large truck crashes; in fact, analysis has shown that upward of 13 percent of commercial drivers involved in a crash were considered to have been fatigued at the time of that crash.

That's why we have rules limiting the number of hours that train engineers and airline pilots can work, and it's why we have a new rule for truck drivers, too. Less than one year ago, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) put [new Hours-of-Service regulations](#) into effect to ensure that drivers have the adequate rest they need to safely operate 80,000-pound commercial vehicles on the road with other motorists.

The current Hours-of-Service rule includes common sense, data-driven changes to reduce truck driver fatigue and [improve safety](#) by reducing the maximum average work week for truckers to 70 hours from 82 hours and requiring a 30-minute break during the first eight hours of their shift.

We [carefully considered](#) the public safety and health risks of long work hours, and solicited input from everyone who has a stake in this important issue, including victims' advocates, truck drivers and companies. The result is a balanced Hours-of-Service rule with analysis showing that the changes save 19 lives and prevent approximately 1,400 crashes and 560 injuries each year. It also shows that the updated rule actually impacts less than 15 percent of the truck driving population – those drivers working the most extreme schedules.

Seems reasonable, right? Well, you might be surprised to learn that there's an effort underway in Congress to suspend these important life-saving changes. To prevent this from happening, many victims are sharing their stories in support of the current Hours-of-Service rules. People like Christina and Gary Mahaney from Jackman, Maine.



On July 19, 2011, a tired trucker dozed off and crashed a 104,000-pound logging truck

on their front lawn, spilling logs into their home and killing their 5-year-old son, Liam who was relaxing on the couch with his parents. Christina and Gary were also injured, and their home was destroyed. The Mahaneys are still struggling to find justice for the death of their son.

On August 16, 2010, a family from Cockeysville, Maryland, was devastated when the tired driver of a triple trailer truck hit five passenger vehicles and two other semis on an Ohio thruway. The first car it crashed into carried the Slattery family. Susan Slattery was killed in the crash while her two sons, Peter and Matthew, were rushed to the hospital with serious injuries. Matthew was left permanently disabled. He, Peter, and their father Ed relive the loss of Susan every day she is not with them.

And on September 20, 2004, near Sherman, Texas, Ron Wood's mother, Betsy, his sister Lisa Wood Martin, and Lisa's three young children were on their way home when a truck driver fell asleep behind the wheel, crossed the median into oncoming traffic, and collided with Lisa's SUV and another vehicle. After being hit by the truck, Lisa's SUV burst into flames, making it impossible to reach the victims trapped inside.



***Passenger vehicle and commercial truck that were struck after fatigued truck driver crossed median on an Ohio thruway into oncoming traffic.***

First responders reported that it was the worst crash they had ever seen. In an instant, five members of the Wood family were gone; in all, ten people were killed and two more injured in that single crash.

I understand that long work hours can be a touchy subject, because many truckers are only paid when the wheels are rolling, not the time they spend sitting in traffic or waiting pickup or unload shipments. But these families remind all of us at the FMCSA that our work is not done until everyone on the road can make it home safely at the end of the day. And as a wife and mother of two, I am committed to preventing tragedies like those that have been shared with me.

It's important that we continue studying the impact of fatigue on commercial drivers and public safety to make our regulations even more effective. But this we know right now: suspending the current Hours-of-Service safety rules will expose families and drivers to greater risk every time they're on the road.

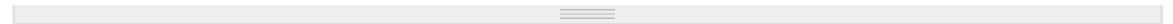


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