

Reduced Fatalities On BC Highways

Front Page Story

This summer season has been relatively peaceful when it comes to commercial traffic. While there have been a number of high profile accidents involving heavy commercial vehicles; most notably a log truck rollover in the Fraser Canyon that closed the highway for several hours and a highway truck that broke through a guardrail on the Granville Street bridge in Vancouver, the trends show a reduction in fatalities; at least so far.

TruckSafe reports that in

British Columbia there were 114 fatalities and 533 serious injuries involving commercial trucks between years the 2000 and 2004. Such high numbers prompted several agencies to examine statistics and develop strategies in order to find the root causes of these serious accidents. The contributing factors to commercial highway accidents are: driving without due care and attention 20%, unsafe speed 14.5%, failing to yield right of way 10.4%, following too closely 10.2%

and weather conditions 9.7%. From these statistics Worksafe, Trucksafe, ICBC, the BC Forest Safety Council, the B.C. Trucking Association, the R.C.M.P., and several other agencies implemented numerous initiatives to reduce accidents on B.C.'s killer highways based on a three "E" approach developed to assess engineering, enforcement, and education.

First of all, the 192 kms of the Fraser Canyon from Hope to Cache Creek was designated a safety corridor to improve the safety and travel of its users. From 1996 to 2002 this stretch of road had the highest number of crash incidents resulting in serious injury and fatality in B.C. Engineering was improved to straighten treacherous curves, centre line and shoulder rumble strips were put in place, improved guard rails were installed and signage noting dangerous corners, overhead obstacles, and speed limitations were improved. Secondly, enforcement by the R.C.M.P. and the CVSE was stepped up to target speed-

ing vehicles, dangerous operation and unsafe loads and equipment. Lastly, educating the public, commercial drivers and the community at large, was and still remains the last step and an ongoing challenge. Several public forums have been held and advertisements and leaflets were distributed to inform highway users on how to share the road with big trucks, to be aware of the road conditions and observe posted warnings.

According to Staff Sergeant Bob Beaudoin, Area Manager of the R.C.M.P.'s Fraser Valley Traffic Services, the plan appears to be working. Initial reports gathered from accident scenes show a reduction in the amount of deadly traffic accidents. It isn't all good news though; accidents resulting in injury are still on the rise. Staff Sergeant Beaudoin believes that ICBC and the Ministry of Highways have done their part by making the road conditions better and Worksafe and legislators have done their part by establishing hours of service legislation and safety incentives. Now it is up to the public to ensure they drive to suit the road conditions and it is his job to remind violators with those pesky little blue tickets.

The challenge is to convince out of province and out of country drivers that warning signs are in place for a reason. Staff Sergeant Beaudoin gives a lot of credit to B.C.'s graduated licensing program and has noticed many accidents are the result of drivers unfamiliar with mountainous roads pushing the limits. Many of the increased traffic accidents involving big trucks are also a result of new drivers or drivers who have carried their licenses from other provinces or countries and failed to pay attention to road signs and posted speed limits on a challenging, unfamiliar highway. Inexperienced small vehicle drivers are just as much to blame as they don't understand the amount of room heavy trucks need to navigate corners or come to a stop. Research by the University of Michigan's Transportation Research Institute's Daniel Blower showed that non-commercial drivers are at fault in 70% of truck-car crashes. The BC Forest Safety Council has acknowledged this and organized a series of public forums in order to educate non-professional drivers of the needs of big trucks. This combined with TruckSafe strategies that promotes improved driver safety programs, pro-

fessional driver qualifications, apprenticeship and training programs and offers economic incentives for safe practices through driver recognition programs, has resulted in a noticeable decline in highway fatalities.

The summer is over and tourist traffic will subside for another year, but increased log hauling is about to resume now that the forest fire risk is reduced. The upcoming fall hunting season also means recreational vehicle traffic off highway is about to begin and then questionable weather is upon us. While initial reports indicate that safety programs on BC roads have been effective, it might still be too early to form any solid conclusions. In the end, it is your job to take part in this safety initiative. If you drive, it is up to you to pay attention, slow down and maintain a safe distance between you and the person you are following. Watch for TruckSafe forums in your community and keep informed of highway conditions online at www.drivebc.ca. 🍁

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