

Role-players must strategise to reduce truck accidents

By [Morné Stoltz](#)

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Although small motor vehicles (47.9%) and minibus taxis (10.1%) accounted for over half the accidents over the 2015/16 festive season, light delivery vehicles (22.7%) and trucks (4.8 %) were also responsible for a high number of accidents resulting in 1,755 people losing their lives during this short period.



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According to Arrive Alive, the most common factors contributing to road accidents include unroadworthy vehicles (smooth tyres, faulty brakes), bursting tyres, inappropriate speed, driving under the influence of alcohol and unsafe overtaking.

Although relatively few in number, some truck accidents have made headlines because of the high number of fatalities when a large vehicle loses control. The large number of heavy vehicles on our roads makes it imperative that measures are put in place to reduce the number of accidents involving trucks. MiWay believes that reversing this trend will take a concerted effort from all role-players and a multi-pronged strategy to produce lasting change.

Costs to economy

Quite understandably, most media reports focus on the high number of deaths caused in these accidents. However, we also need to bear in mind the costs to the economy of vehicle accidents. Direct costs were recently estimated at R306bn, which includes hospital care, police time, clearing accident scenes and so on. To this must be added the indirect costs of lost work hours and, for transport operators and their customers, delayed or destroyed cargos.

In addition, the cost to the insurance industry is very high and is ultimately reflected in higher vehicle insurance premiums, something that affects the entire insurance market.

For the trucking and logistics industries, technology can hold some of the answers. For example, the compulsory use of retarders to augment the primary braking systems on heavy vehicles could help prevent the frequent accidents caused by the overheating of brake friction pads on long, steep passes such as Van Reenen's Pass.

Such a requirement would have to be accompanied by stringent and uniform enforcement. If the whole industry does not buy into the idea, and it is not enforced properly, those operators who do install retarders will actually be disadvantaged because they are incurring higher overheads.

Part of solution

Enforcement of these or any other safety regulations is only part of the solution. The industry as a whole has to be convinced that paying greater attention to safety makes sound business sense.

Fewer accidents and less delays will help logistics companies improve their operating costs and enhance their reputation with satisfied customers. Improved safety precautions are also likely to lead to lower insurance premiums, particularly as on-board 'black boxes' become standard in heavy vehicles.

Other factors to consider in a multi-faceted approach to road safety would be better management of drivers' needs for proper, regular rest and also advanced driving instruction. Initiatives like these have proven to reduce the number of accidents in which professional logistics companies are involved, with considerable benefits for them.

Heavy vehicles are integral to today's efficient supply chains. Without them, the supply chain would be broken, and goods would not reach their destination at the correct time. Improving the safety record of this vital industry is clearly important and it can only be done, MiWay believes, if major role-players such as insurance companies, the Department of Transport, logistics companies and drivers all commit to a strategy that addresses and reduces the causes of truck accidents in particular.

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