

05/07 Driver fatigue contributes to fatal crash

Safety and health alert

Incident

A commercial vehicle driver was fatally injured when the B-Double he was driving left the road and crashed into trees. The truck driver was on the return leg of a trip to the Eastern States when the incident occurred. The commercial vehicle drifted off the left-hand side of the Eyre Highway near Balladonia and across the gravel shoulder of the road. The vehicle drove down the 1.5 metre embankment and continued into the bush for a distance of approximately 200 metres before striking several large trees, which caused extensive damage to the prime mover and fatal injuries to the driver.

The Police reported to WorkSafe that there were no signs of the brakes being applied and that the driver was not wearing a seatbelt at the time of the incident. It was also possible that the vehicle cruise control had been activated.

It was determined that the commercial vehicle driver had been working for approximately 33 hours prior to the incident, and it was unlikely that he achieved any sleep at all during that time. The available evidence indicates that driver fatigue played a major part in this fatal accident.

Factors to consider

- Not getting enough rest or sleep when driving for long periods of time.
- Not wearing a seatbelt.
- Engaging the cruise control when fatigued.

Recommendations

1. All drivers should ensure that they achieve enough sleep prior to undertaking a journey, and also during any extended trips.
2. Commercial vehicle drivers should always ensure they achieve at least seven hours non-work time in any 24-hour period, as required under the Western Australian Regulations for driving commercial vehicles.
 - Scientific evidence shows that a person who has less than seven continuous hours' sleep in a 24-hour period is more likely to be involved in a fatigue related accident.
3. Always wear a seatbelt when driving.
4. Avoid using the cruise control function when feeling drowsy.

Further information

- Code of Practice for Fatigue Management for Commercial Vehicle Drivers.
- *Occupational Safety & Health Regulations 1996* – Division 10.
- Stay Alert at the Wheel.

Further information can be obtained from WorkSafe's internet site www.worksafe.wa.gov.au or by contacting customer service on 1300 307 877 or email safety@docep.wa.gov.au

