

The health and safety of transport workers in the European Union: findings of the EU-OSHA



Authors: Sarah Copsey, Elke Schneider, Xabier Irastorza, European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, Bilbao, Spain; Véronique de Broeck, Marthe Verjans, Prevent, Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Belgium; Mark Liddle, Health and Safety Laboratory, UK; Ellen Schmitz-Felten, Kooperationsstelle Hamburg, Germany

Introduction

The European Community Strategy 2007-2012 on health and safety at work (1) notes that the transport sector, along with construction, agriculture, fishing and health and social services, continues to be a sector which is particularly dangerous. For this reason the Governing Board of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) gave the Agency the tasks of providing an overview of the OSH situation in the transport sector in the EU Member States and collecting good practice information on occupational risk prevention in road transport. This work is still in progress although some preliminary results of these tasks are now available (2, 3, 4)

Employment

Employment – 2006, EU-25: about 6 million workers

•Share within the whole economy: about 3%

•Variations between the MS: about 1.9% in Germany - about 6% in Estonia and Latvia.

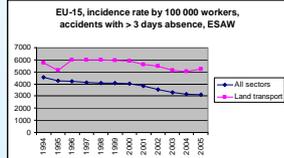
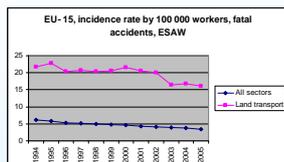
•The land transport is by far the largest sub sector (88% of the workers)

•Focus in research on health and safety aspect!

•Transport sector is a small company sector (<50 employees).

Work Accidents in the road transport sector

Although rates have been decreasing, workers in land transport in the EU-15 have a much higher accident rate than on average (almost 5-fold for fatal accidents, 1.7 times higher for serious accidents)



Work-related health problems

A high risk of musculoskeletal injuries and stress-related disorders

High number of musculoskeletal disorders (back, neck and shoulder problems)

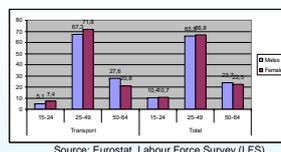
Correlation with age

Stress-related health problems

- Asbestos related diseases
- Noise induced hearing loss
- Infectious diseases

Age and gender

Percentage distribution of employment in transport and total, by age and gender, EU25, 2006.



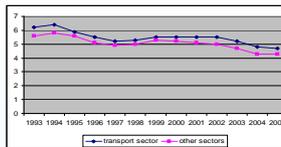
Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey (LFS)

- In 2006 around 68% of workers in transport were aged between 25 and 49.
- There was a higher share of older workers for men, while the situation is the opposite for women.
- Women made up 15.9%, while the corresponding share of female workers in overall employment across all activity sectors was 44.5%.

Data from EU Member States

Germany: Consistently higher absenteeism rates were observed in the transport sector

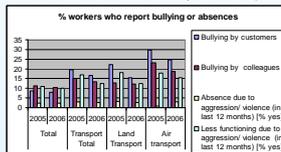
Development of sickness absence 1993-2005 (in %) in the branch Traffic/Transport, Germany



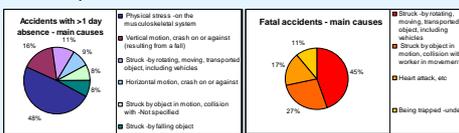
Source: Absenteeism report 2006, http://wido.de/ftz_2006.html

Netherlands: more than 20% of the workers bullied by customers

Bullying and causes of violence in the transport sector (NEA 2005 and 2006)



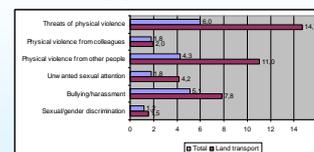
Spain: Most common type of accident due to physical stress on the muscular system.



Source: Occupational accidents statistics

Exposures - psychosocial risks

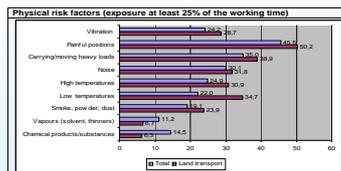
Transport workers report particularly high shares of (threats of) physical violence, and bullying/harassment.



Source: 2005 European Survey on Working Conditions, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Dublin.

Exposures – physical risks

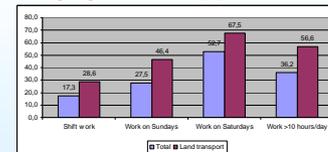
Higher than average exposure to many physical risk factors in transport:



Source: 2005 European Survey on Working Conditions, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Dublin.

Working time issues

Transport workers reporting higher than average shift work, weekend work and working longer than 10 hours (%).



Source: 2005 European Survey on Working Conditions, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Dublin.

Conclusions

- Transport workers are highly exposed to a number of physical and organisational risks, including emerging risks such as increasing violence to drivers.
- Conditions of work must be improved for a more diverse working population, with an increasing proportion of women.
- Transport workers require high levels of professional skills and competence. They have a major responsibility on the road.
- If society wants motivated and skilled transport workers, more attention must be paid to the working conditions in this sector.

The health and safety of transport workers in the European Union: findings of the EU-OSHA



Authors: Sarah Copsey, Elke Schneider, Xabier Irastorza, European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, Bilbao, Spain; Véronique de Broeck, Marthe Verjans, Prevent, Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Belgium; Mark Liddle, Health and Safety Laboratory, UK; Ellen Schmitz-Felten, Kooperationsstelle Hamburg, Germany

Good practice to prevent risks to road transport drivers:

EU-OSHA work programme 2008-10 (publication of results 2010)

Objectives:

To support the exchange of good practice information in the sector and the sharing of experience by providing examples of:

- Preventing occupational risks in road transport
- How to promote OSH good practice and raise awareness of OSH issues within the sector

Activities:

- Web feature and database of links to good practice
- Case study reports on:

- Preventing occupational risks in road haulage
- Preventing occupational risks to bus drivers
- Review (scoping exercise) of good practice information available for:
 - Taxi drivers
 - Motorbike and bicycle couriers

• A review of some specific accidents in the sector: lessons learnt regarding good practice

Not just driving risks

A broad range of occupational risks to transport drivers, not just road safety issues and driving hazards, is being covered in the projects, including:

- Loading, unloading vehicles
- Falls climbing in and out of cabs
- Rest and toilet facilities
- Vehicle design and maintenance
- Musculoskeletal and vibration related disorders
- Hot and cold cabs
- Stress
- Violence from members of the public

The project also recognises that drivers are not a homogenous group and will consider older drivers, young drivers, women drivers



On-going collection of case examples

Case 1: Preventing third-party violence to staff in urban public transport, France

EU-OSHA runs good practice awards competitions related to its campaigns. The following case comes from its 2002 campaign on preventing psychosocial risks.

Problem: High incidence of violence to staff, physical damage to buses

What was done – measures included:

- Development and implementation of a formal agreement
- Participation in local crime prevention scheme and activities
- Discussion with local community of the 'stone throwing' districts.
- Prevention officer appointed with outreach responsibilities, e.g. to work with schools
- Post-incident legal support and counselling made available to staff. Positive support of the judiciary obtained
- Intervention officers appointed. Assistants working with ticket inspectors
- Protective coatings applied to side windows
- Drivers cabs separated from passengers
- CCTV, tracking systems
- Radio links for rapid intervention

More information: <http://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/reports/104/view>

Case 2: Development of knowledge sharing among drivers to prevent non-traffic related work accidents – Denmark

Background

The vast majority of work accidents which goods transport drivers experience are related to loading and unloading e.g. non-traffic related.

Aim

To use workers' experiences in the prevention of loading and unloading accidents.

What was done

Working conditions in loading areas are frequently poor and responsibility for the safety of drivers in these situations is uncertain. Experienced drivers are familiar with the problems that exist but their knowledge has been previously untapped. In this example, the company has, therefore, sought to increase organisational learning in relation to hazards connected to loading areas. Managers in collaboration with drivers have developed a scheme (participatory design) that was subsequently used to gather information about working conditions in over 500 different loading areas. This information has been integrated into the IT system within the company so that the information is available to drivers when they print out their daily route.

Results

The use of participatory methods both enabled the use of the drivers' wealth of experience and meant that they also gained a sense of ownership of the project.

Organisation: Arla foods, Denmark

Case 3: DocStop, Germany.



Background

The medical support for drivers of heavy goods is a problem. Heavy goods vehicle drivers are often for a long time on the road and have limited possibilities to consult a doctor, which can lead to the driver driving with health impairments or taking medicine which is not specially prescribed.

Objectives

The aim of Doc Stop is to improve medical care of haulage drivers in transit on European transportation routes by building up a medical information and supply network for drivers. Drivers who need medical attendance should have the possibility to consult a doctor while being on the road.

What was done

DocStop was established as a pilot project in 2007, based on a survey carried out in Germany, in which suggestions to improve the situation were made. A network of contact points at truck stops has been established. These are located within 4 kilometres of medical facilities. Good support for the project has enabled the provision of a medical care system for haulage drivers throughout Germany. Information and communication methods to promote the project such as TV, radio, flyers, trade organisations and personal dialogue with drivers are used. The project was initially run in Germany and is now being implemented at the European level. Dr. Dieter-L. Koch, Member of the European Parliament, is chair of the organisation. DocStop is supported by many organisations and enterprises in Germany and Switzerland e.g. Germany's Statutory Accident Insurance for the vehicle operating trade, BGF, BGL, ADAC, MAN, Mercedes Benz, swissdrivers etc.

Results

At the time of publication, about 200 contact points had been created, situated at rest areas along the highways. Docstop appears to be well accepted by drivers and has support from the sector.

Further information: <http://www.docstoponline.eu>

Some initial conclusions from the good practice case reports

- Drivers in the road haulage sector are difficult to reach and not always open to accepting OSH information that they receive
- Drivers need to be intimately involved in solutions – solutions need to be developed by drivers for drivers (use of participatory methods) – to use their experience, to gain their acceptance
- New technology in cabs can be used for OSH purposes
- Sectoral bodies dedicated to the working environment are often the best forum to develop guidance and solutions and promote the sharing of information
- OSH solutions may implicate additional time to carry out tasks, which must be recognised in work organisation and working time.
- Large organisations are in a position to set OSH standards for their delivery contractors etc. This in turn can stimulate these small businesses to adopt these standards when working with other clients.
- Training, refresher training and checks that procedures are being followed are very important for drivers, but must be carried out in the context of an organisational system to prevent risks with clear management commitment.
- Many drivers are self-employed and working away from a fixed base. Many have long experience as drivers and are used to very independent ways of working. This has various implications for communication such as:
 - Allocation of sufficient resources, e.g. to allow TV and radio promotion
 - Using places they frequent – stop areas etc,
 - Ensuring approaches are practical but not patronising
 - Ensuring advice and solutions are based on drivers' practical experiences and using drivers' as advocates
- Solutions need to involve customers as well. Employers of drivers' can find it difficult to ensure the safety of their employees whilst they are working at customer premises. The competitive nature of the business makes haulage firms reluctant to make demands of their customers, who can wrongly assume it is not their responsibility.

Existing EU-OSHA resources on road transport

Resources that EU-OSHA had developed on road transport prior to starting the latest activities include:

- Transport of dangerous substances – links to resources: http://osha.europa.eu/good_practice/topics/dangerous_substances/index_topic?topicpath=good_practice/topics/dangerous_substances/dstransport
- Case studies from other programmes and campaigns
- Factsheet18 - Preventing Road Accidents involving Heavy Goods Vehicles: <http://osha.europa.eu/publications/factsheets/18/>

EU-OSHA factsheets are freely downloadable from EU-OSHA website in various EU languages. FACTS18 was produced jointly by EU-OSHA and European Commission Directorate General for Energy and Transport. It provides simple guidance aimed at employers and drivers.

References

- (1) Brussels, 21 Feb. 2007, Communication from the Commission to the Council and European Parliament, COM(2007)62
- (2) Thematic report – transport, unpublished draft results, EU-OSHA Topic Centre Risk Observatory
- (3) Preventing risks to drivers in road haulage, unpublished draft results, EU-OSHA Topic Centre Work Environment
- (4) Good practice to reach and influence drivers: OSH programmes and campaigns in the road transport sector, unpublished draft results, EU-OSHA Topic Centre Work Environment