



FOR RELEASE

Thursday, 2nd May 2002

New proposed rules on driving time unlikely to reduce fatigue – a factor in 20% of commercial road transport crashes

A new report published today by ETSC concludes that the European Commission's new proposal for regulating driving time in commercial road transport could allow two consecutive 80 hour working weeks and do little to reduce the build up of driving fatigue – its main purpose!

Dr Nick McDonald, Chairman of ETSC's working group on Driver Fatigue bringing together experts from across the EU said:

“This Regulation permits daily averages of 13 hours or more for some working weeks, whereas accident risk data demonstrate that after an 11 hour work span the risk of being involved in an accident doubles. We have evidence that drivers are currently working as long as this.

The problem with this proposal is that there's no link with the recently agreed Working Time Directive and we understand that the Regulation would take precedence. If no such link is established and working and driving time are not brought together, EU policy will have failed to curb driving fatigue associated with excessive working hours. It is essential to reduce permissible driving time to an extent that will bring total working time within acceptable limits”.

Jeanne Breen, ETSC Executive Director said: “Given that around 18% of road deaths across the EU involve commercial road transport vehicles, reducing driving fatigue will play its part in reaching the ambitious new EU target to reduce deaths by 50% by the year 2010. We urge the EU institutions who are currently discussing this proposal to take immediate steps to remedy this fundamental contradiction in EU policy for regulating working time and driving time in road transport.

Contact: ETSC secretariat - + 32 (0)2 230 4106

information@etsc.be

Notes for editors:

1. The ETSC report also points to surveys which show that over 50% of long haul drivers have fallen asleep at the wheel. The EU CARE road accident database indicates that 7,865 deaths out of 43,404 (18%) in 1997 (the last year for which full figures are available) involved commercial trucks.

2. A summary of recommendations from the ETSC report *The role of driver fatigue in commercial road transport crashes* is given overleaf. The Executive Summary and the report are available on ETSC's website www.etsc.be.

3. The European Commission presented on 12 October 2001 a proposal for a Regulation on driving time in the road transport sector (COM (2001) 573 final). The new Regulation lays down rules on driving time, breaks and rest periods to be observed by drivers employed in the transport both of passengers and freight.

4. The Working Time Directive 2002/15/EC adopted on 11 March 2002 lays down minimum requirements with regard to the working time of mobile workers performing road transport activities. Under the new directive, the average maximum weekly working time may not exceed 48 hours but can be extended to 60 hours if the average of 48 hours per week is not exceeded during a four-month reference period.

THE ROLE OF DRIVING FATIGUE IN COMMERCIAL ROAD TRANSPORT CRASHES

SUMMARY OF ETSC RECOMMENDATIONS

There are three main areas of policy which need to be addressed if there is to be a chance of overcoming the limitations of current policy and successfully reducing the influence of fatigue on safety. These are the overall framework of regulation and enforcement, the specific provisions for hours of work and rest, and the co-ordination of research that would support and develop this policy.

The framework of regulation and enforcement

The framework for the regulation of working and driving time needs to be broadened to include a range of complementary measures which are specifically designed to improve the safety of road transport operations.

- Safety management. It is the responsibility of the transport operator to manage the operation safely, and of the driver to drive safely and only when in a fit condition to do so. These responsibilities should be the starting point for a framework regulation for the safe management of working time for all operators irrespective of size.
- Code of practice. A code of good practice for effective fatigue management in road transport should be promulgated and promoted by the relevant authorities on the basis of input from impartial expertise.
- Contracts. The contractual relationship between shippers/freight forwarders/prime contractors and sub-contractors should be regulated through the adoption of obligatory contracts allowing verification of compliance with labour laws and operator and traffic regulations.
- Auditing, monitoring and inspection. The implementation of all the above should be subject to systematic auditing and monitoring at the level at which responsibility rests for compliance with the requirements. This should be complemented by an improved, standardised system of roadside inspection that ensures a high probability of detection of non-compliance. A new generation of digital tachographs is essential to effective monitoring.
- Enforcement. There needs to be a consistent level of enforcement across the Community, with penalties designed to strongly influence behaviour towards compliance. Consideration should be given to measures which would support and encourage small operators with few management resources to develop more effective management of their operation.
- Training. Managing fatigue and alertness should be an essential component of a curriculum for the professional training of drivers and should be incorporated in the new European Directive on driver training.
- Management and operator qualifications. Managing working time in order to ameliorate fatigue should be an essential part of mandatory qualification standards for transport operators.

Hours of work and rest

The framework of hours limitations should explicitly take account of the scientific evidence concerning fatigue and the risk of accident. In particular:

- Daily and weekly rest. Sufficient time for daily rest and recuperation needs to be guaranteed. Where this cannot be taken at physiologically appropriate times of the day or in adequate facilities, adequate time for full recuperation on a weekly (or shorter) basis must be ensured.
- Night-work. Permissible working hours during the hours of circadian low activation should be substantially fewer than those permitted during the day.
- Working and driving time. There should be a co-ordinated approach to regulating driving and working time to ensure that permissible driving times do not inevitably lead to unacceptably high working times.
- Rest-breaks. Adequate time and facilities should be ensured for rest, meal-breaks and naps.

Intensification of research

A co-ordinated programme of research is needed to address some of the gaps in the evidence. In particular it should seek to:

- Quantify more precisely and routinely (e.g. in official road accident statistics) the role of fatigue in road safety.
- Extend our knowledge of the parameters that govern the influence of fatigue, especially those factors which span over several days or longer.
- Identify the social and commercial costs associated with fatigue related accidents.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of regulatory interventions and other counter-measures in reducing fatigue-related accidents.