

Statement of Steve Owings

Good Morning. I'm Steve Owings. My wife, Susan, & I are from Atlanta. The two of us co-founded Road Safe America after our son, Cullum, was killed in a truck crash.

In 2002, Cullum and his younger brother, Pierce, were on their way back to college in Virginia after spending Thanksgiving at home with us. Their vehicle was stopped in a traffic jam when a speeding tractor-trailer, using cruise control, came up behind them too fast and didn't stop. Pierce, a freshman, miraculously survived, thank God, but his big brother and best friend died in his arms that night.

Until this horrific loss, I was not aware that the European Union had already mandated the use of speed limiters in large trucks since 1992. I was also unaware that, because of this regulation, most of the major truck manufacturers then began installing speed limiting capability in their vehicles, regardless of where they would be sold. By the late 1990s, most heavy trucks were being manufactured with speed limiting capability worldwide.

This realization infuriated me and my family. Trucks in the United States have had a readily available safety technology already built in for decades and many companies here already use it because it both enhances safety and increases profit. You see, limiting the top speed reduces fuel-use and saves maintenance expenses since tires and brakes both last longer.

Too many companies refuse to use it however, and some even argue that it will make our roads less safe. They claim that cars will run into the backs of slower moving trucks. To recognize this as a hollow argument one only needs to look to the Autobahn in Germany. There is no speed limit at all but the big rigs on it, because of the required use of their speed limiter capability, cannot exceed 56 mph, as is the case everywhere in the European Union. So if this were a legitimate risk, it would have become extremely clear there a long time ago.

Our government's own study of this issue also concluded that there is no evidence of that so-called "speed differential" risk but said if it exists at all, it is overwhelmingly offset by the clear safety benefits of setting the speed limiters on our heaviest trucks. Additional real world evidence from Ontario, which recently published before and after findings since requiring use of speed limiters on big rigs there, found that deaths in heavy truck crashes dropped nearly a fourth.

More than a decade after we joined with leaders in the trucking industry in asking for this requirement, and working through the rulemaking process, the Department of Transportation is at last at the point where they can issue a final rule on this common-sense change. Yet, they have greatly weakened the rule by only proposing that this technology be set on new, future-manufactured big rigs. The government's proposed rule recognized the fact that speed limiters have been standard on most trucks of this size since the late 90s and that the cost of adding the ability to older units is minimal, but still inexplicably crippled the rule's potential in their proposal.

Requiring speed limiters on all trucks is a commonsense, practical solution that currently exists, so no capital expense is needed on most trucks, and only a small cost is involved to add it to older units. This not only stops crashes, reduces injuries, and saves lives, but it also increases the trucking industry's bottom line. The U.S. is shamefully now the only leading country on earth without such a rule. As a reference point, Zambia is ahead of us in this regard!

I urge the Department of Transportation to issue a final rule requiring speed limiters in all trucks and to do it now - before any other family has to experience another preventable, devastating loss.