

*Gearing Up for Safety: Motor Carrier
Safety in a Competitive Environment*

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GEARING UP for SAFETY



Motor Carrier Safety in a Competitive Environment

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES OFFICE OF TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT

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Foreword

Trucks carry three-quarters of the dollar value of all commercial goods transported in the United States, and the speed, convenience, and cost-effectiveness of truck transport make this ratio unlikely to change quickly. The intercity bus and commercial trucking industries are governed by Federal motor carrier regulations, and the Motor Carrier Act of 1980 eliminated many economic restrictions limiting entry to the industry. Federal safety regulations remain basically unchanged, however, and were expanded gradually in range and coverage during the 1980s. Despite this, the number of highway accidents involving heavy trucks climbed during the first half of the decade, prompting concern among public and industry officials, alike. As I write this, the southwest horizon beyond my window—Virginia—is punctuated by a billowing, black cloud from a classic tanker truck accident and fire.

Although many studies on the impacts of deregulation have been undertaken, questions have lingered about the adequacy of existing Federal safety policies and programs. The Committee on Public Works and Transportation and the Subcommittee on Government Activities and Transportation of the Committee on Government Operations, both of the House of Representatives, asked the Office of Technology Assessment to determine how well existing safety policies, regulations, and technologies meet the government's responsibility for ensuring safety in the motor carrier industry. The study was endorsed by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

This report contains the results of that analysis. A review of critical intergovernmental issues for the Department of Transportation and State Governments has been added to the basic questions about the adequacy of Federal standards and programs. During the course of the study, it became clear that the report would have to consider how policy is implemented, and consequently, the relationship between the Department of Transportation and the States, which have become important partners in Federal safety programs. This comprehensive look at motor carrier safety also includes the economic framework of the industry as it affects operations, an analysis of safety data, and a review of research and development needs for safety technologies for both industry and government.

Throughout the study, the advisory panel, review group, workshop participants, and a host of contributors played key roles in developing the major issues and contributed a broad and invaluable range of perspectives. OTA thanks them for their substantial commitment of time and energy. Their participation does not necessarily represent endorsement of the contents of the report, for which OTA bears sole responsibility.


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NOTE: OTA appreciates and is grateful for the valuable assistance and thoughtful critiques provided by the advisor panel members. The panel does not, however, necessarily approve, disapprove, or endorse this report. OTA assumes full responsibility for the report and the accuracy of its contents.

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