

America's Dangerous Trucks: A Policy Analysis

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America's Dangerous Trucks: A Policy Perspective

Key Facts and Context

- **Truck accidents:** ~5,000 deaths/year, 150,000 injuries.
- **Underride crashes:**
 - Occur when smaller vehicles slide under trucks.
 - Consequences: blunt trauma, fatalities, ineffective car safety systems.

Policy Problem: Underride Crashes

Persistent Issues

- Inconsistent regulations over decades.
- **NHTSA:** Delayed safety standards due to lobbying, lack of data.
- **Advocacy Needs:**
 - Bridging gaps between safety activists, policymakers, and public awareness.

Advocacy Coalitions Framework (ACF)

Competing Advocacy Groups

- **Safety Advocates:**
 - Families of victims (e.g., Hein and Karth families).
 - Engineers (e.g., Aaron Kiefer) pushing for innovative solutions.
 - Grassroots campaigns targeting Congress and NHTSA.
- **Industry Resistance:**
 - ATA and trucking manufacturers emphasize costs and feasibility concerns.
 - Concerns about “unintended consequences” of side guards.

Dynamics

- Coalitions influenced by beliefs, resources, and external events.
- **Policy Change:** Occurs through learning, external shocks, or negotiated agreements.

The Role of Attention

- **Triggering Events:**
 - High-profile crashes (e.g., Jayne Mansfield, Riley Hein).
 - Advocacy efforts by victims' families.
- **Media Attention:** Documentaries like *America's Dangerous Trucks* highlight the issue.

Policy Windows

- **Kingdon's Model:**
 - Problem Stream: Rising fatalities and advocacy efforts.
 - Policy Stream: Proposals like Stop Overrides Act.
 - Political Stream: Bipartisan interest (Gillibrand & Rubio), but limited traction.
- **Challenge:** Sustaining momentum amid lobbying and political shifts.

NHTSA as a Case Study

- **Inputs:**
 - Public outcry, data from advocacy groups, media investigations.
- **Processes:**
 - Rule-making slowed by deregulation, industry lobbying.
 - Inconsistent data collection impedes informed decisions.
- **Outputs:**
 - 1998 rear guard regulation (delayed decades).
 - 2022 updated standards; insufficient side guard mandates.
- **Feedback:**
 - Fatalities and lawsuits highlight policy gaps.

Successful Advocacy Strategies

1. **Data-Driven Arguments:**

- Advocacy groups highlight flaws in NHTSA's crash data (GAO report).
- Prove cost-effectiveness of safety measures.

2. **Coalition Building:**

- Bipartisan sponsors (e.g., Gillibrand and Rubio).
- Collaborations between victims' families, lawyers, and engineers.

3. **Direct Action:**

- Public trials (e.g., Hein family's \$19M verdict) force industry attention.
- Grassroots campaigns elevate stories of victims.

Remaining Barriers

- Industry claims of high costs and feasibility challenges.
- Lack of urgency in government and reliance on outdated data.

Governance Challenges

- **Regulatory Capture:**
 - Agencies like NHTSA influenced by industry lobbying.
 - Resistance to robust safety measures prioritizes costs over lives.
- **Fragmented Authority:**
 - States and federal agencies lack uniform data collection and standards.

Strategies for Reform

- **Strengthen Advocacy Coalitions:**
 - Unite diverse stakeholders around common goals.
- **Improve Data Collection:**
 - Standardize crash reports across states.
- **Reframe Costs:**
 - Shift focus from economic costs to human lives saved.

Key Questions

1. How can safety advocates maintain public and political attention?
2. What role should data improvements play in policymaking?
3. How can public administrators address regulatory capture while advancing safety?

Call to Action

- **Students:**
 - Reflect on how advocacy coalitions influence policy outcomes.
 - Consider the ethical responsibility of public administrators in balancing economic and social goals.
- **Future Policymakers:**
 - Explore innovative solutions to break policy deadlocks.
 - Prioritize equity and safety in addressing public issues.

Advocacy for Safer Roads

- Sustained attention and coalition building are key to advancing override safety.
- “The cost of inaction is measured in lives lost.”