

Speed limiters on trucks improve safety and air quality

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By Paul Landry, Special to the Sun

What saves a truck owner more than \$4,000 a year, improves road safety and air quality and reduces greenhouse gases?

Thirty-three countries -- including the United Kingdom, Australia and Sweden -- and Ontario and Quebec know the answer: Speed limiters on trucks.

In 2009, Ontario and Quebec mandated speed limiters for trucks set at 105 kph.

Speed limiters (or electronic control modules -- ECMs) have been installed in most trucks manufactured since 1995.

They do exactly what their name implies -- govern the maximum speed of a vehicle -- but they must be activated before they will work.

This can be done at the factory or by the dealer or the vehicle's owner in a few minutes.

In the interests of safety, vehicle maintenance and fuel economy, many trucking companies have taken advantage of this technology.

While no statistics are available for Canada, more than 60 per cent of U.S. trucks are speed-limited, including 77 per cent of vehicles owned by larger companies. Other companies use other technologies to monitor vehicle speeds or set speed policies.

Since the Canadian experience often mirrors that of the U.S., it would be safe to say that most North American trucking companies are limiting the speed of their vehicles.

So if limiting maximum speeds of trucks is such a good idea and most companies are already doing it, why do we need another law?

Like most rules, a speed-limiter law would deal with the small, but unsafe minority that threatens the public and competes unfairly with law-abiding trucking companies.

It wouldn't be a road safety panacea, but it would address speeding without increasing policing costs.

In addition to modestly improving road safety, a lower maximum speed also means fewer emissions.

For example, reducing the highway speed of a truck from to 105 km/h from 115 cuts fuel consumption and greenhouse gases by about seven per cent, and saves wear and tear on engine, tire and brake components. That's more than 4,000 litres of fuel and 11 tonnes of greenhouse gases a year for a typical long-haul truck.

Why hasn't our provincial government acted on the industry's call to mandate activation of speed limiters?

It may be because speeds as high as 105 km/h may not be a significant cause of truck crashes in B.C.

Speed-related truck crashes are more apt to occur when trucks are operated "too fast for conditions" at much lower speeds.

Nonetheless, the relationship between speed and crash severity is well known. Simply put, the faster a truck moves, the greater the potential injury for anyone involved in a crash.

Speed limiter opponents cite lack of power to pass other vehicles or climb hills as vital concerns.

But trucks that use speed limiters can still pass other vehicles when it's safe to do so and trucks can seldom maintain a speed of 105 km/h on hills.

The experience of the many companies that have already deployed speed limiters would suggest that naysayers' concerns are ill-founded.

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