

TEXAS & SOUTHWEST

Texas leads nation in truck-crash fatalities, safety group says

TOP STATES FOR TRUCK FATALITIES, 1997

STATE	CRASH DEATHS
Texas	454
California	409
Florida	308
Georgia	254
North Carolina	231
Ohio	220
Pennsylvania	172
Alabama	171
Illinois	166
New York	159

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Transportation

More government oversight urged; industry official says record improving

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Texas tops the nation in truck-crash fatalities, with 454 people dying last year on the state's highways in collisions with big rigs, a safety advocacy group said Friday.

Nationally, 5,355 people died and 133,000 were hurt in 444,000 crashes with big rigs, Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways said, releasing its findings at a news conference.

The nonprofit group, which wants the government to increase its oversight of the trucking industry, said large trucks were responsi-

ble for 12 percent of highway fatalities last year but accounted for only 3 percent of all registered vehicles.

But Transportation Department and trucking industry officials noted that truck fatalities have declined 6 percent since 1988, even as the number of cars and trucks on the roadways continues to increase.

Trucks account for a disproportionately large share of deaths because they log far more miles than passenger vehicles, the officials said.

"Any death on our nation's high-

ways is a tragedy, especially that of a child," said Walter McCormick Jr., president of the American Trucking Associations. "But the hysteria that is being orchestrated cannot hide the facts: Truck safety is improving every day, and the risk of being killed in a car-truck collision is at an all-time low."

In addition to the 454 deaths in Texas, 11,276 Texans were injured last year in collisions with trucks, according to the safety group. The accidents, which killed 75 truckers, also claimed the lives of 66 children.

The 1997 death toll in Texas marked a 1 percent increase from the previous year. Nationally, truck deaths were up 4 percent.

Although Texas may lead the nation in the sheer number of truck-related fatalities, the state fares much better in fatalities per miles driven, said the head of the Texas Motor Transportation Association.

"If you look at our accidents per million miles traveled, which is much more indicative of how you are doing, then we are not even in the top 10 of states," said Bill Webb, motor transportation association president.

He estimated commercial vehicles racked up 17 billion miles on Texas roads last year.

The safety group said the problem is that government and industry are not using all the safeguards they could, including retrofitting all tractor-trailers with reflective markings, reducing truckers' hours behind the wheel and increasing safety inspections.

The Transportation Department's Office of Motor Carriers "has reduced truck inspections and failed to issue crucial safety standards," said the group's chairwoman, Joan Claybrook.