

# SEVEN TIRE TIPS THAT COULD SAVE YOUR LIFE

A 52-year-old man died in a crash in July when the tractor-trailer he was driving went off the side of a New Jersey expressway and hit a bridge abutment. A tire blowout was likely to blame.

Blowouts are among the most dreaded big-rig emergencies, and they currently have the attention of federal regulators. In August, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration proposed a rule that would require new vehicles weighing more than 26,000 pounds to be equipped with a speed-limiting device. Most truck tires are not meant to handle constant speeds of more than 75 mph, and federal investigators say high speeds and poor maintenance lead to tire-related crashes. The agencies are considering speed caps of 60, 65 or 68 mph.

In FMCSA's annual Large Truck and Bus Crash Facts reports, tires are typically the most common vehicle-related factors for trucks in fatal crashes. And 10 percent of U.S. Department of Transportation out-of-service violations involve tire problems. If one of your tractor-trailer tires explodes, you could lose control of a highway-speed vehicle weighing upwards of 70,000 pounds. This greatly endangers you and others on the road. Flying tire debris, tire pieces left on roadways and cargo spills also present hazards for other motorists.

Most tire-related accidents are preventable, and as an owner-operator, you face two levels of responsibility: as the driver and as the person accountable for vehicle maintenance. Most steps for preventing tire-related accidents involve things you should be doing anyway: maintaining your rig in a timely and knowledgeable manner, conducting thorough pre-trip inspections and driving at reasonable speeds. These actions help you improve safety on all fronts. Here are seven tire tips that can help keep you—and those with whom you share the road—safe:



## **SLOW DOWN**

According to NHTSA, most truck tires are rated at 75 mph. Tire manufacturers say traveling faster can cause blowouts. A 2015 study by the Associated Press found 14 states have speed limits of 75 mph or faster for large trucks. Drive at a safe speed, regardless of the posted limit.

## **CHOOSE THE RIGHT TIRES**

Make sure your tires are appropriate for your applications and properly match them. Mismatching dual tire diameters causes one tire to carry more load than the other. Dual tires should be within a quarter-inch diameter of one another. Mixing bias-ply and radial tires on the same axle also can have devastating consequences, according to a blog post by Gilbreath & Associates, an injury and accident law firm.

## **MAKE SURE TIRES ARE PROPERLY INFLATED**

This is key. Under- and over-inflated tires create safety problems, yet less than half of tractor tires are within  $\pm 5$  psi of their target pressure, according to multiple studies. Follow tire manufacturers' load and inflation tables and other recommendations, and check pressures before every trip, when tires are at ambient temperature. Use a calibrated inflation gauge for accuracy. Retain pressure with high-quality poly-carbonate or steel stem caps. Tire-monitoring and automatic-inflation systems can significantly aid in maintaining proper tire pressure.

## **ADDRESS TIRE DAMAGE**

Inspect tires for tread and sidewall damage and air leaks prior to each trip. Check tread using a tread-depth gauge, and be on the lookout for irregular wear. Repair, replace or retread tires as appropriate.

## **STAY ON SCHEDULE WITH MAINTENANCE**

Misalignment, loose wheel bearings and poor tire rotation lead to irregular tire wear. Have your vehicle aligned regularly, perform wheel-bearing maintenance and rotate tires as needed according to your operation. Your rotation schedule should ensure tires on the same axle have a similar tread depth.

## **RESPOND TO RECALLS**

Tires, like other vehicle parts, sometimes have manufacturer defects. While this might seem beyond your control, you can—and should—act if a recall affects your tires. Follow the manufacturer's and U.S. DOT's instructions.

## **KNOW WHAT TO DO IF A STEER TIRE BLOWS OUT**

A steer-tire blowout is especially dangerous because it pulls the truck to one side. Keep both hands on the wheel, and avoid sharp braking, which can cause you to lose the forward movement you need to stay in control. If you experience loss of control, accelerate enough to make any needed steering corrections. Then slow gradually to a stop.