

Instructor Notes: Whether you're driving a small car carrier or a large tandem tow truck, truck driving is one of the hardest jobs on a body. In fact, it is always at or near the top of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) list of professions for lost work due to injury. With that in mind, use this opportunity to discuss ideas on how your towing operators can reduce their risk of injury while driving.

Safety Meeting 2016 #5 – Ergonomics for Towing Operators



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Driving a tow truck is a tough job. Think about how you feel after a long day behind the wheel. Do you feel exhausted? Does your body feel stiff? Do your neck and shoulders feel sore? Does your back ache? If you answered yes to any of these questions I guess you understand and somewhat agree that driving a tow truck – let alone any truck – is a challenging profession. The good news is that there are several things you can do to lessen the risk of driving injuries and it has to do with ergonomics.

What Is Ergonomics?

Ergonomics is the scientific study of people and their working conditions, especially done in order to reduce repetitive injuries while improving effectiveness. In a typical office, ergonomic features in a cubicle-style workstation are designed for comfort and stress reduction. Another example of ergonomics are the seats in newer trucks that are equipped with lower-back lumbar support to make driving more comfortable. Simply put, ergonomics is “fitting the job to the person.”

What Are Driving Injuries?

In truth, there are many hazards related to driving, particularly in doing this activity frequently or for a long period of time and most pertain to musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). Below are some of the most common MSDs:

- Neck, shoulder and back pain
- Cramps in the legs
- Poor circulation in the legs and buttocks
- Low back injuries
- Body aches and stiffness

The More You Drive, the Worse it Gets

To make matters worse, according to Recaro North America, 40 percent of all truck drivers suffer from chronic back problems. The figure jumps to over 65 percent for professional drivers with 12 to 15 years behind the wheel. To help alleviate pressure on the spinal column, drivers are encouraged to adjust their seats properly.

How to Properly Adjust Your Seat

Get to know your seat. Some seats in larger trucks have an owner's manual. Adjust the depth and height of the seat so your feet can comfortably reach the gas pedal, brake and clutch (if equipped) and ensure the pedals can be pressed without moving your lower back forward, off the back of the seat.

Your backrest should be adjusted so the steering wheel can be reached with slightly bent arms with your hands at the 9 and 3 o'clock positions.

Slightly recline the back of your seat (approximately 110 degrees from your legs) to reduce disc pressure and to relax your back muscles.

If equipped, the lumbar support helps to support your lower back and avoids “hollow back” or “hunchback” sitting postures. If not equipped, a rolled up towel may offer similar benefits.

Ensure your back is leaning on the backrest from your bottom to your shoulder blades.

Your thighs should be completely supported by the seat. The back of your knee should be kept an inch

from the seat cushion and your knees should not be higher than your hips.

If your seat is equipped with an air-suspension, be careful not to select a setting that is too soft; otherwise the seat may hit the floor when driving on poor road conditions, causing a back injury.

Sit with your bottom against the back of the seat, your upper body in an upright position, extend your chest outward and lean back your upper body. Good posture counts.

Improving Your Driving Comfort

By using an ergonomically correct seat and developing good habits while driving, you can combat the stress and unhealthy conditions it may pose.

Add extra padding over your seat as needed. This way, your seat absorbs much of the vibration from the vehicle.

Break your driving into sessions by taking at least five minutes of break every hour. Take the opportunity to rest and stretch a little during each break.

Within limits, regularly change your seating positions while driving to avoid poor circulation of your blood.

Change hand positioning on the steering wheel often. Do not squeeze harder than necessary.

Adjust your mirrors so you can see all of them without slouching or twisting. Use the mirrors as a cue to sit up when you slouch, instead of readjusting them.

By paying attention to your posture and by properly fitting your seat to your body, you can reduce driving pain, discomfort and fatigue.