

Law Bulletin

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Roll On Safely Alabama *By David Kimberley*

Alabama ranks 10th in the nation in the number of large trucks involved in fatal crashes, although it only ranks 23rd in the nation in population. In fact, from 1993 to 2003, 1728 people have lost their lives in Alabama in traffic crashes with large trucks. In 2003, there was a 15% increase from 2002. In 2003 alone, 147 people lost their lives in vehicle crashes involving large trucks in Alabama and another 1800 people were injured.

Cusimano, Keener, Roberts, Kimberley & Miles and the consumer advocate group, Alabama Watch, are sponsoring the campaign of Roll On Safely Alabama to help reduce the number of unsafe trucks on the road. There is a toll-free number for reporting unsafe trucks, 1-888-883-ROAD, publicized on bumper stickers, windshield stickers, and billboards in the State of Alabama.

Also, involved in the campaign are legislative initiatives to improve trucking safety. Logs or other wood in the rough are the number one tonnage commodity moved in the State of Alabama according to the latest Bureau of Transportation Statistics. Approximately 39.5 short tons were moved in 1997, topping all other commodities.

The majority of these logs are moved less than 50 miles. Currently, if a load is not intended for interstate commerce, logging trucks are not required to carry the minimum liability insurance required of interstate trucks. Also, logging trucks, unlike interstate commercial carriers, are exempt from length restrictions and having to use wind deflection devices. There is also currently a bill in the Legislature, House Bill 57, which would exempt logging trucks from weight restrictions.

A bill is being introduced, sponsored by Etowah County Senator Larry Means, to require all logging trucks to carry the same insurance required of other commercial trucks. This would enhance the safety of log trucks since insurance companies would likely require higher compliance with safety standards and driver standards in order to provide the insurance, and it will not cost the State of Alabama a penny.

All readers are urged to oppose the logging truck exemptions and contact your State Legislator to voice your opinion. Trucks often weigh 20 to 30 times as much as passenger cars, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, and everything that can be done to make these trucks as safe as possible needs to be implemented on our highways.

Another legislative initiative being introduced by Senator Larry Means, and promoted by the Roll On Safely Alabama Campaign is the allowance of State Troopers and other law enforcement to issue tickets when they know a violation of rules or standards has been violated, even if the driver is not behind the wheel. Currently, a law enforcement official must actually witness most highway violations in order to be able to write a ticket, even if he knows from the circumstances that a violation has occurred. This legislation would assist law enforcement to help keep our roads safe without having to witness the truck carrying the offending load.

So, support Senator Means' bills, and also let your Legislator know that you oppose exemptions for logging trucks from restrictions that have to be adhered to by other commercial truckers.

On the Federal scene, Wal-Mart and other retailers are lobbying Congress to extend workdays for truckers from 14 hours to 16 hours, greatly increasing the risk of crashes being caused because of increased driver fatigue and/or falling asleep at the wheel.

Please contact your Congressman to oppose this extension of hours truckers can be behind the wheel. This extension would make roadways even more dangerous for all drivers.

Let's help all the good truckers in our state "Roll On Safely Alabama!" Contact us to receive your free bumper sticker and windshield sticker!

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