

Thought Leadership

SHARED OBLIGATION: THIRD PARTY DRIVING BEHAVIOUR IMPACTS INDUSTRY ROAD SAFETY EFFORTS

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Road safety research by a major transport and logistics provider shows most fatal incidents it experiences are caused by third parties, indicating that improving road safety around heavy vehicles is a pressing responsibility government and the community shares with the transport industry.

Findings Patterns in Fatalities

To better understand its risks and take preventative action, logistics giant Toll Group examined every on-road and driver fatality at its global operations over a 10 year period. The company operates more than 2000 prime movers and 2400 light vehicles in Australia alone, travelling a distance equivalent to the moon and back every day.

- In most instances, fatalities were caused by a third party, not the heavy vehicle driver. Light vehicle drivers are over-represented in the fatalities (37 per cent) (see [Figure 1](#)) suggesting light vehicle drivers and other road users need to be better educated about how to share the road safely with heavy vehicles.
- Contractor and casual drivers were much more likely to be involved in fatalities than employee drivers. While this relationship cannot be said to be 'causal', industry needs to understand why the correlation exists.
- Almost 10 per cent of fatalities were non-work related (employee and contractor combined), overwhelmingly the result of a heart attack experienced on a Toll premises or in a Toll vehicle. This suggests a need to improve drivers' cardiovascular health, in support of which Toll Group is developing 'fitness for duty' standards along the lines of what exists for rail and aviation workers.

- One in seven fatalities (14 per cent) were confirmed 'suicide by truck', where third parties intentionally use the velocity of the truck to end their lives. Almost certainly an underestimate, this issue requires community and government involvement (see ['There's A Real Human Being In This Truck': The Effect Of 'Suicide By Truck' On Drivers](#))

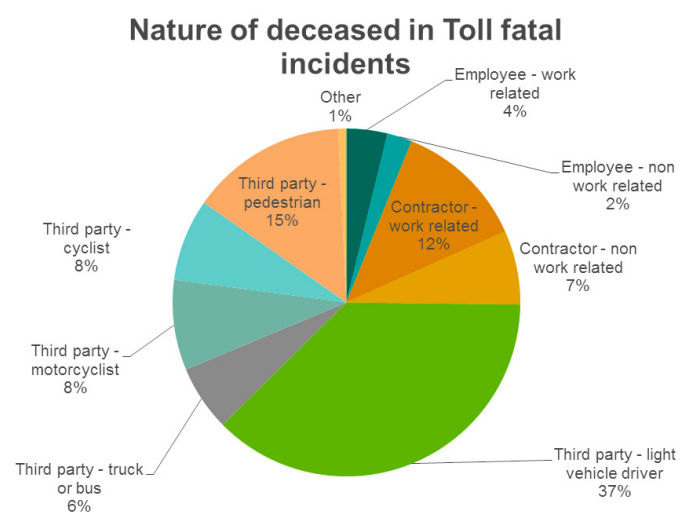


Figure 1

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Third Party Education

The research findings suggest that, contrary to popular belief and some media portrayals, most fatal incidents involving heavy vehicles are the fault of the third party rather than the heavy vehicle driver. Toll's analysis is also consistent with NTI data in its finding that third party road users are, generally speaking, the party at fault.

"There is a big question mark over how well light vehicle drivers are educated about how to drive safely around trucks," according to Toll Group's General Manager for Road Transport Safety and Compliance Dr Sarah Jones, who conducted Toll's fatalities analysis.

"Drawing on my own personal experience, until I joined this industry I had no idea about safe stopping distances for trucks and I didn't understand what the 'do not overtake turning vehicle' message actually meant.

"It's also very interesting to me that if you look at national and state road safety strategies, most of them don't talk about heavy vehicle-light vehicle interaction at all."

The findings reinforce Toll's belief that there is an opportunity for government and road safety bodies to ensure light vehicle drivers are educated about driving safely around trucks, such as safe stopping distances and overtaking.

Some operators and at least one state transport body have taken the lead and produced [videos](#) to [educate](#) drivers while a [video](#) produced as part of the Re:act project also aimed to 'humanise' drivers. The Australian Trucking Association's [Safety Truck](#) aims to educate children about truck safety.

Partnership Approach

The third-party findings played a part in Toll rethinking how it can achieve an incident and injury free (IIF) workplace when there are factors outside of its control. While the company has a strong reporting culture and carefully tracks safety metrics, the externalities prompted a shift away from setting a hard date on when IIF would be achieved. "We need to be relentless on what we can control and on creating a personal relationship to safety among our people", says Jones. "But where third party pedestrians or other drivers or customers are behaving in ways that put our people and other users of the road network at risk, we have to be creative. We have to partner, educate, upskill and persuade".

The research also showed that Toll's employee fatalities are trending downwards, improving by 300 per cent to one death for every 116 million kilometres driven. That improvement coincides with the introduction of several technologies to improve driver safety, including driver-state sensing machines to help manage fatigue and in-vehicle cameras and speed monitoring to encourage safe driving behaviour. In-vehicle camera footage of incidents and near misses also helps identify causal factors and preventative intervention.

Investing in a modern fleet also increases chances of survival in the event of an incident. "Technology will take you so far", says Jones, "but culture, behaviour and attitude are what drives safety". Everyone at Toll is expected to be a safety leader, with that expectation set by the leadership team. "Drivers are the last line of defence in the chain of responsibility, the people who do the final check on whether the vehicle, the load and the task are safe. Our drivers have an obligation to refuse to take a load if they feel it cannot be done safely. That is an act of leadership, especially if you're on a customer site and they're your bread and butter".

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What Does it all Mean?

"Our results suggest that key opportunities to influence road fatalities and serious injuries are being missed by industry, community and government," Toll says.

In addition to increasing community understanding of how to drive safely around trucks, the company believes such opportunities include a consistent national approach to heavy vehicle and heavy vehicle driver regulation, providing incentives for operators to invest in modern fleets with life-saving technologies, and including transport operators in road safety discussions.

Its findings show government and the community need to work together with the transport industry to improve road safety around heavy vehicles, and that such efforts will only be as effective as the strength of these road safety partnerships.