

Truck drivers face hazards on the job every day, hazards that don't even involve driving.

# Overexertion leading cause of injury in commercial trucking

By Susan Main

SafetyDriven and WorkSafeBC are sharing the message that injuries from overexertion, falls, slips and trips, and more are preventable.

When we think about the most common causes of truck drivers' injuries, we might think of motor vehicle crashes. But drivers are actually injured more often when their trucks are parked.

There were 10,436 claims for lost work-time between 2013 and 2017 in B.C.'s trucking and transport industry. The most common source of injury in this industry is overexertion, followed by motor vehicle incidents, falls, and struck-by incidents. On average, each injury resulted in 80 days of lost work, with an average claim cost of \$44,130. For a truck driver who relies on these work hours, an injury and time off work can be devastating.

## Take enough time to load and unload

Sam Pattison, general manager of T & P Trucking, describes the challenge of being in a business that

promises quick service while also asking drivers to slow down and put safety first.

"As an employer, we want to maximize our efficiency but at the same time, we don't want to do that at the expense of safety," Pattison says. "We tell them to take their time when they're loading and unloading — to make sure they're not skipping any steps when it comes to safety protocols. We don't want them cutting corners and putting themselves in any risky situations."

Pattison points out that drivers visit many different locations in a day's work. Each one is part of a driver's workplace — even if it's a one-person operation or a rural location without signage. Says Pattison, "We remind them to keep our safety standards in mind wherever they are."

## Stretching can reduce the risk

Darshan Gill, safety officer at Phoenix Truck and Crane, advises drivers to stretch for at least five minutes at the start of a shift — especially during the colder months of the year. This reduces risk of overexertion that can lead to musculoskeletal injury (MSI).

“In winter, the drivers are up before sunrise. It’s still below zero when they’re starting their first loads of the day. I remind them to warm up during pre-trip inspections when they’re already moving around,” Gill says. “And if they’ve been driving for three or four hours, they should stretch for a couple of minutes to get their backs moving from a stationary position before they start pushing and pulling on things. I remind them to move around and get more active when they’re walking toward where they’ll unstrap their load.”

During his new worker orientations, Gill gives out cards with a list of stretches that can be done in a truck cab. He gets them from SafetyDriven – Trucking Safety Council of BC, along with other helpful tools. Says Gill: “We didn’t have all these resources before. Being able to provide the exact exercises for drivers has helped a lot.”

Gill talks with drivers about the most common injuries he’s seen. Many involve tools such as straps, pry bars, and landing gear for securing loads. (See resources below for information on using these tools safely, with proper posture.) It takes a lot of physical force to crank landing gear and cinch straps; that’s why a good warm-up and proper technique is important, he says.

### Three-point contact and proper footwear to avoid slips, trips, falls

Gill reminds drivers to wear non-slip footwear to avoid slips, trips, and falls, especially when the ground is icy. He also instructs them to avoid falls when entering and exiting their cabs by using the three-point contact method. Many of the drivers have been working for more than 30 years and have seen a lot of these common dangers.

“They all know someone who had to stop working because of a back injury from a slip and fall,” Gill says. “We’re dealing with drivers who are experienced. They’re masters of their craft. It’s not so much new training or anything groundbreaking. It’s just consistent reminders.”

### More resources for truck drivers’ safety

Jacqueline Morrison, WorkSafeBC transportation industry specialist, agrees.

“They’re professional. They’ve done this work for a long time. This isn’t something they don’t know — but

it only takes one time to be seriously injured,” Morrison says, describing the rationale behind new resources from WorkSafeBC and SafetyDriven.

New videos from SafetyDriven and WorkSafeBC tell the stories of three truck drivers whose lives change after a workplace injury. Arvind, Donna, and Joe’s stories can be found at [worksafebc.com/transportation](https://worksafebc.com/transportation). The page also offers new information sheets for reducing injury when using [pry bars](#), [landing gear](#), and [straps](#).

“Successful, smart transportation companies like T & P Trucking and Phoenix Truck and Crane get it,” says Mark Donnelly, executive director of SafetyDriven. “They understand that improving safety in their day-to-day operations benefits their people and also helps improve their bottom line. SafetyDriven is pleased to help by providing safety courses, training videos, tools, tips, and templates.”

Visit [safetydriven.ca](https://safetydriven.ca) for a card of truck drivers’ stretches and much more. 🧘

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