

Data Collection and Reporting of Underride Crashes by Law Enforcement

Safety Starts With Crash Data

The United States Department of Transportation recognizes that addressing highway safety challenges starts with quality crash data, and the collection of quality crash data starts with you as a law enforcement officer. There is almost no safety program, initiative, countermeasure or analysis that can be done without quality crash data. Your efforts in investigating and reporting on crashes form the foundation of all safety programs.

A recent study conducted by the U.S. Government Accountability Office¹ (GAO) found that truck underride crashes are in need of improved and more consistent data collection. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) defines truck underride crashes as **collisions in which a car slides under the body of a truck—such as a tractor-trailer or single-unit truck—due to the height difference between the vehicles. NHTSA categorizes a crash in which any portion of a passenger vehicle slides under the body of a larger truck or trailer as an underride crash.** As shown in Figures 1 and 2, during these crashes the under-ridden vehicle may intrude into the striking vehicle's passenger compartment. In other instances, the striking vehicle may pass completely under the struck vehicle and exit the other side, shearing off the roof of the striking vehicle. These underride crashes can lead to severe injuries or fatalities.

Figure 1: Side truck underride crash



Figure 2: Rear truck underride crash



The GAO study found that traffic fatalities from underride crashes involving large trucks are likely underreported among police crash reports.

¹ Truck Underride Guards: Improved Data Collection, Inspections, and Research Needed, www.gao.gov/products/gao-19-264

Truck Underride Crash Data – A National Perspective

Both the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) and NHTSA share the mission to reduce crashes, injuries, and fatalities. To carry out this mission at the national level, FMCSA and NHTSA rely on law enforcement officials to conduct crash investigations and determine and reliably report their contributing factors. The availability of accurate underride crash data is critical in identifying and analyzing crash trends and developing countermeasures and strategies to mitigate and prevent these types of crashes.

Inconsistency in State Definitions of Underride

While all States have crash report forms and procedures to gather data following a crash, State forms and crash investigation procedures differ in whether and how underride crash-related information is captured and reported. To assist with accurately accounting for underride crashes, particularly in the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS), NHTSA is asking law enforcement to always use the term “underride” when referencing crashes that meet the criterion as defined earlier in this publication.

Law Enforcement Underride Crash Reporting

FMCSA and NHTSA recognize that although law enforcement officials collect data about motor vehicle crashes, there are significant differences in the way that such data are gathered and reported, leading to inconsistencies in interpretation.

Variations exist in data definitions and the number and type of data elements collected, and the threshold for collecting data varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Given these variations, we are asking law enforcement to use any available mechanism in their reporting systems to carefully describe the relative location of the striking vehicle with respect to the struck vehicle and to accurately report underride crash data in individual crash reports, whether or not underride crash data fields are included in the crash form or in the event that officers use diagrams and narrative information. As noted above, specifying the term “underride” in the report will greatly assist in improving consistency and accurate identification of these crashes. NHTSA will continue to provide training and guidance resources to the law enforcement community to improve accurate and consistent reporting of truck underride crashes.

For more information, contact NHTSA at www.nhtsa.gov/about-nhtsa/contact-us.



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