Seat belt use among truck drivers

a study by NTF Väst

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Background and purpose

Sweden has a higher total rate of seat belt use than many other countries. Despite this, studies of fatal accidents show that six out of ten people killed in traffic accidents were not wearing a seat belt. The figure is even higher if we only study heavy truck drivers: nine out of ten heavy truck drivers killed were not wearing a seat belt.

In a study from 2012, almost 98% of the individuals observed in the front seats of passenger cars were wearing seat belts. The observed rate of seat belt use among truck drivers was considerably lower. In heavy trucks without a trailer, 64% of the drivers wore seat belts, while in heavy trucks with a trailer, 59% of drivers wore seat belts. Although seat belt use in heavy trucks was not studied through fully comparable methods during the period, a significant increase has been documented over the past 15 years. In 1996 only about 2% of heavy truck drivers used seat belts. In 1999 it became obligatory under Swedish law for professional drivers to wear seat belts, whereas this category had previously been exempt. This lead to an increase in seat belt use among heavy truck drivers.

Although truck drivers today have a higher rate of seat belt use, many still drive unbelted. 50-80% of truck drivers killed in road traffic accidents would have survived if they had worn a seat belt. This considered, work must be done to further increase heavy truck drivers' seat belt use.

NTF Väst was commissioned by Volvo Trucks to carry out a study of seat belt use among heavy truck drivers. The aims of the study were to learn more about truck drivers' attitudes towards seat belts and about seat belt use among Swedish and foreign drivers, and to find out whether the rate of seat belt use differs according to the make of truck driven.

Method

NTF Väst's study was based on observation of seat belt use in heavy vehicles and interviews with truck drivers. The interviews were conducted on thirteen occasions during 2011 and 2012 at the following lay-bys: Stig Center, Sandsjöbacka (both sides of the E6 motorway) and Bollebygd. Moreover, observations without interviews were carried out in April-May 2012 and February 2013, both at the lay-bys mentioned above and in Skandiahamnen harbour.

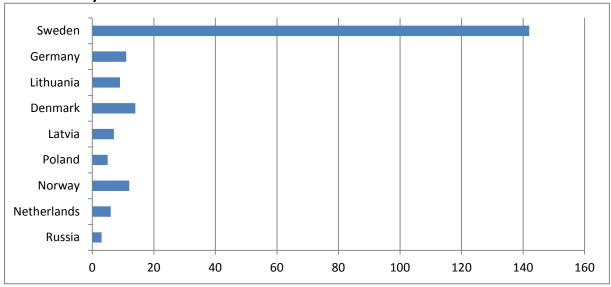
The total duration of the interview sessions was approximately four hours. Three persons worked during each session, with one person standing at the lay-by entrance observing the drivers and two persons interviewing drivers who parked their trucks in the lay-by. The interviews were based on a questionnaire containing questions about the drivers' seat belt habits. The questionnaire was translated into English, German, Polish and Russian. Drivers who spoke neither Swedish nor English were asked to fill out the questionnaire themselves in German, Polish or Russian. A total of 214 drivers answered the questions. In sessions where only observations were made, one person worked.

It was sometimes hard to discern clearly from outside the truck whether the driver was wearing a seat belt. Only reliable observations (736 observations) were included in this study. Some of the drivers were both observed and interviewed. The majority of the drivers were only observed, while some were only interviewed.

Sources: Swedish Transport Administration, VTI

Results of interviews with truck drivers

1 - Nationality of the interviewed drivers



A total of 214 drivers answered the questionnaire. All were men and two thirds of the interviewees were from Sweden.

2 a – What total proportion of the drivers wore a seat belt?



When asked if they were wearing a belt when they drove into the lay-by, 146 drivers answered yes. 68 drivers answered no. Fifteen of these said they were not wearing a belt today, but that they usually did.

2 b – What proportion of the 142 Swedish drivers wore a seat belt?



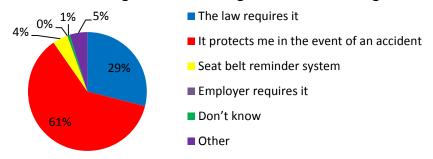
Three quarters of the Swedish drivers reported wearing a seat belt.

2 c – What proportion of the 72 foreign drivers wore a seat belt?



58% of the foreign drivers wore a seat belt, a lower rate than for the Swedish drivers.

3 - The 146 seat belt wearers gave the following reasons for wearing one



Most of respondents reported wearing a seat belt because it protects them in traffic accidents. Just under a third reported wearing a seat belt because the law requires it. Six drivers did so because of the seat belt reminder system. None of the drivers' main reason for using a seat belt was that their employer required it. In the free comment space, ten drivers reported wearing a seat belt out of habit. Other comments:

[&]quot;I used not to wear a seat belt, but then I did a course and learned how important it is, so now I do."

[&]quot;I put my seat belt on automatically without even thinking about it."

[&]quot;I've had accidents in the past."

4 - The 68 non-seat belt wearers gave the following reasons for not wearing one



Half of the non-seat belt wearers said the reason was that it is bothersome or time-consuming to put the seat belt on. A third found it uncomfortable when driving. Three drivers said a seat belt is unnecessary.

Free comments included:

"I only use it when driving long distances."

"There's no seat belt in my truck."

"Wearing a seat belt makes it difficult to move."

"Laziness."

5 - The 68 non-seat belt wearers said they would wear one



What would increase seat belt use among the non-seat belt wearers? A third said they would wear a seat belt if it was more comfortable. Just over a quarter would wear one if there were more police checks or higher fines. 18% cited other reasons. Comments included:

"If there was something that made it less bother to put on."

"I use a seat belt when the road is slippery."

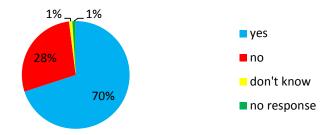
"If there was a seat belt in my truck."

"Nothing can make me wear a seat belt."

"If I had had an accident."

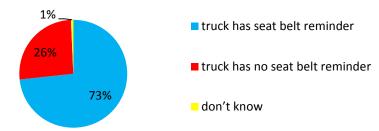
13% said they would wear a seat belt if their truck had a stronger seat belt reminder system. 6% said they would wear one if their employer required it.

6 a - Total proportion of drivers with a seat belt reminder system



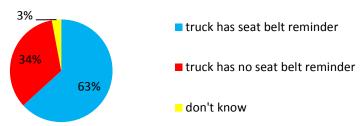
70% of the interviewees said their truck has a seat belt reminder system.

6 b - Proportion of the 146 seat belt wearers with a seat belt reminder system



73% of the seat belt wearers had a seat belt reminder system in their truck.

6 c – Proportion of the 68 non-seat belt wearers with a seat belt reminder system



Fewer non-seat belt wearers (63%) had a seat belt reminder system than seat belt wearers (73%).

7 a – Attitude towards seat belt reminder with audio signal, total



The majority of the drivers (58%) were very or fairly positive towards a seat belt reminder with an audio signal.

7 b - Attitude towards seat belt reminder system with audio signal among the 146 seat belt wearers



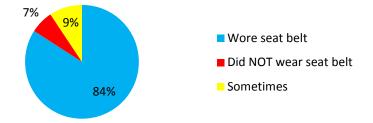
Two thirds of the seat belt wearers were very positive or fairly positive towards a seat belt reminder with an audio signal.

7 c - Attitude towards seat belt reminder system with audio signal among the 68 non-seat belt wearers



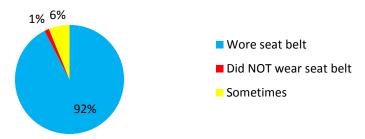
38% of the non-seat belt wearers were fairly positive or very positive towards a seat belt reminder with an audio signal. 34% were fairly negative or very negative. 28% were neutral.

8 a - Total seat belt use among passenger car drivers



Does the frequency of seat belt use differ between truck drivers and passenger car drivers? Yes. Considerably more of the drivers reported wearing seat belts when driving a passenger car. 84% reported always wearing a seat belt in a passenger car, compared to only 68% wearing one in a truck.

8 b – Proportion of the 146 drivers who wore a seat belt in a truck who also wore one in a passenger car



Nine out of ten drivers who wore a seat belt in a truck also reported wearing one in a passenger car.

8 c – Proportion of the 68 drivers who did not wear a seat belt in a truck but wore one in a passenger car



Less than half (44%) of the drivers who did not wear a seat belt in a truck reported wearing one when driving a passenger car. 38% reported using a seat belt sometimes. A fifth reported never wearing a seat belt.

8 d – Proportion of the 142 Swedish drivers who wore a seat belt in a passenger car



8 e – Proportion of the 72 foreign drivers who wore a seat belt in a passenger car

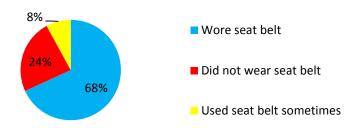


A lower proportion of foreign drivers (75%) than Swedish drivers (89%) wore a seat belt in a passenger car.

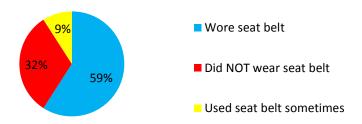
9 a - Proportion of seat belt wearers among Volvo truck drivers (82 drivers)



9 b - Proportion of seat belt wearers among Scania truck drivers (88 drivers)



9 c - Proportion of seat belt wearers among drivers of other truck makes (44 drivers)



Volvo truck drivers had the highest belt use, with 73% reporting wearing a seat belt. 68% of Scania drivers reported wearing a seat belt, and 59% of drivers of other truck makes reported wearing a seat belt.

Results of seat belt observations

10 a – What total proportion of drivers wore a seat belt?



A total of 736 reliable seat belt observations were made. All the observed drivers were men, and half of the observed drivers were wearing seat belts.

There was a discrepancy between the number of drivers observed to be wearing a seat belt (50%) and the number of drivers who claimed to have been wearing one. Because the researchers recorded the Swedish trucks' registration numbers, it was possible to demonstrate that 24 of the drivers who claimed to have worn a seat belt actually had not. This shows that some drivers inaccurately claimed to have worn a seat belt.

10 b – What proportion of the drivers in Swedish registered trucks wore a seat belt?



Of the 736 trucks observed, 484 were registered in Sweden. 57% of the drivers of these trucks wore seat belts.

10 c – What proportion of drivers in foreign registered trucks wore a seat belt?



Of the 736 trucks observed, 252 were registered outside Sweden. 37% of the drivers of these trucks wore a seat belt. This shows that fewer drivers of trucks registered outside Sweden wore seat belts than of trucks registered in Sweden.

11 a - Seat belt use among Volvo truck drivers (257 drivers)



11 b - Seat belt use among Scania truck drivers (205 drivers)



11 c - Seat belt use among drivers of other truck makes (274 drivers)



The results show that the actual observed seat belt use was lower than the use reported by the interviewees. However, even taking this into account, seat belt use was higher among Volvo truck drivers (58%) than among Scania drivers (53%) or drivers of other truck makes (40%).

Conclusions

NTF Väst's study was based on observation of seat belt use in heavy vehicles and interviews with truck drivers. A total of 736 reliable seat belt observations were made and 214 drivers were interviewed. All were men.

50% of the 736 observed truck drivers were wearing seat belts. By comparison, 68% of the interviewees reported wearing a seat belt. Our results showed a clear discrepancy; more drivers reported wearing a seat belt than was actually the case.

The observed frequency of seat belt use was higher among drivers of Swedish registered trucks (57%) then of foreign registered trucks (37%).

The majority of the interviewees (61%) reported wearing a seat belt because it protects them in traffic accidents. A third reported wearing a seat belt because the law requires it.

Half of the non-seat belt wearers said the reason was that it is bothersome or time-consuming to put the seat belt on. A third reported not wearing a seat belt because it is uncomfortable when driving.

A third said they would wear a seat belt if it was more comfortable. Just over a quarter would wear one if there were more police checks or higher fines.

73% of the seat belt wearers had a seat belt reminder system in their truck. Fewer of the non-seat belt wearers (63%) had a seat belt reminder system in their truck.

The majority of the drivers (58%) were very or fairly positive towards a seat belt reminder with an audio signal. Non-seat belt wearers were also relatively positive towards a seat belt reminder with an audio signal. However, only nine of the drivers responded that this type of system would make them wear a seat belt.

Considerably more of the drivers reported wearing a seat belt when driving a passenger car. 84% reported always wearing a seat belt in a passenger car, compared to only 68% who reported wearing one in a truck.

Volvo truck drivers had the highest rate of seat belt use, both according to their own report and as noted during the observations. The actual observed seat belt use was lower than reported by the interviewees. 58% of the Volvo drivers were observed to be wearing a seat belt, compared to 53% of the Scania drivers and 40% of drivers of other truck makes.

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