

STATEMENT OF FAMILIES, SURVIVORS, AND SAFETY GROUPS ON RELEASE OF GAO STUDY ON TRUCK UNDERRIDE GUARDS

For Immediate Release: April 15, 2019
CONTACT: Beth Weaver, 301-814-4088
beth_weaver@verizon.net

Today, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report, [*Truck Underride Guards, Improved Data Collection, Inspections, and Research Needed*](#). The report underscores the serious need to improve reporting, coding, and analyzing of federal crash data, specifically for truck underride crashes. Currently, there are widespread discrepancies in the way underride is defined by law enforcement officers, differing data fields or elements relating to underride depending on the state crash form (if it is present at all), and no common definition of what constitutes a truck underride crash. This leads to truck underride crashes, and the resulting injuries and fatalities, being missed at various points from the data collection process, which, ultimately results in an undercount of the total number of truck underride crashes. Improvements are urgently needed to this data collection process. Additionally, commonsense solutions are necessary to reduce underride crashes including comprehensive underride protection which can prevent these needless deaths and injuries.

“The GAO’s report confirms what the Truck Safety Coalition has been saying for years: there is an undercounting of truck underride crashes. Unfortunately, these uncounted victims and survivors will continue to be invisible to a federal government that justifies policy proposals, such as underride guards, by quantifying benefits based on data which is known to be incomplete while not making the effort to address this shortcoming,” said **Harry Adler, Executive Director of the Truck Safety Coalition**. “If anything, the GAO report steels our resolve to continue our work to ensure that all truck crashes are accurately captured and coded to identify solutions moving forward.”

“Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety was not surprised by the GAO’s finding that ‘variability in the data collection process likely leads to underreporting [of underride crashes].’ How could it not?” asked **Cathy Chase, President of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety**. “With differing definitions of ‘underride’ among jurisdictions, discrepancies in state crash forms and documentation practices, and inadequate information for law enforcement about what constitutes an underride crash, accurately assessing the actual extent of truck underride crashes in our country is virtually impossible. However, we do know that at least hundreds of people are needlessly dying in truck underride crashes every year. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has issued multiple recommendations for upgraded rear underride guards and for side and front underride protection systems. The public has waited long enough for government action. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) should swiftly disseminate information to state and local police forces on how to properly identify and record a truck underride collision. And, Congress should take immediate action on the Stop Underrides Act (S. 665/H.R.1511), a long-overdue solution to a long-standing safety problem.”

“As a survivor of a truck underride crash, I have paid the costs of inaction. More than 40 surgeries and lifelong debilitating injuries,” said **Nancy Meuleners, of Minneapolis**,

Minnesota. “NHTSA and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) should not look at this GAO report and do nothing. On the contrary, this report should spur the agencies to immediately address the lack of specific requirements that rear guards be inspected annually for defects or damage. Because without a maintenance standard, requiring stronger rear guards may be for naught if they are not properly maintained or replaced when damaged.”

Jennifer Tierney, a board member of Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways, whose father, James Mooney, was killed in a truck underride crash, stated, “While the GAO report offered several recommendations that the Agency should have been working on already, like updating the Model Minimum Uniform Crash Criteria (MMUCC) to include a field for underride, I am disappointed by the GAO’s lack of a recommendation to update the rear underride guard standard. The report highlights the fact that all eight major trailer manufacturers have passed the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety’s (IIHS) ToughGuard test, and that some of these manufacturers provide the improved rear guards as a standard feature on all new trailers. That is why Congress should pass the Stop Underrides Acts, which would require rear underride guards to be updated to pass the IIHS ToughGuard test.”

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