



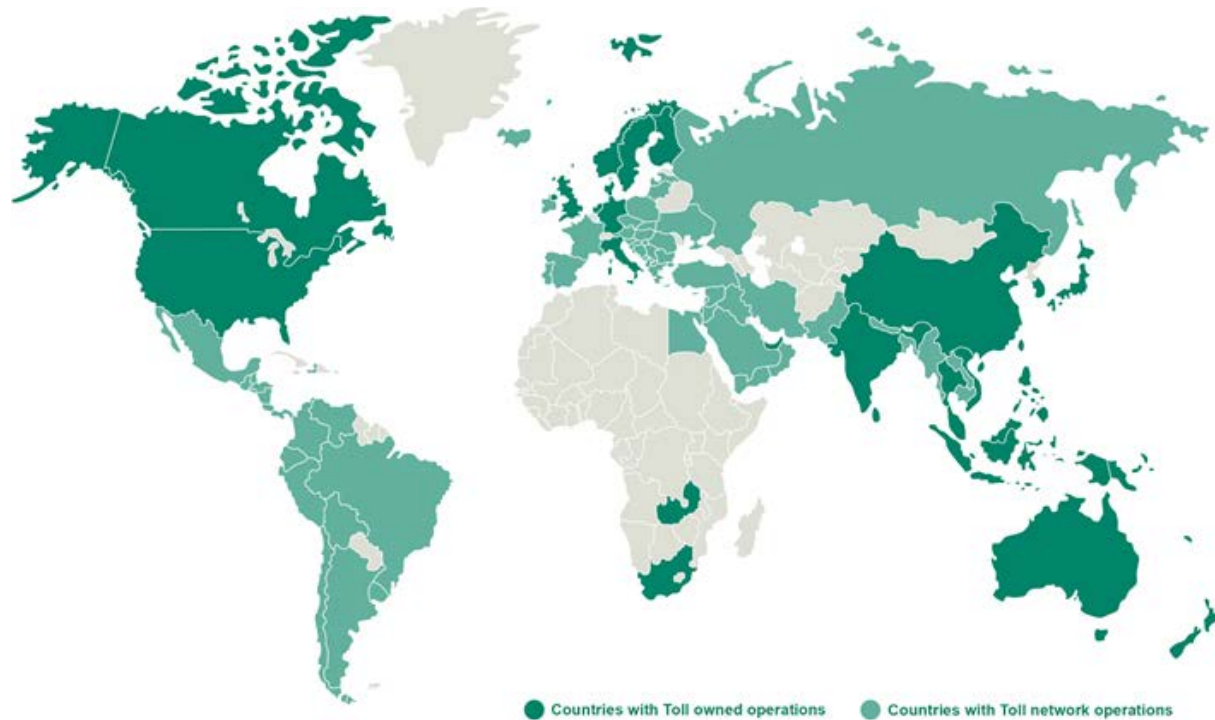
Suicide by truck: a hidden occupational hazard

Dr Sarah Jones | General Manager Road Transport Safety and Compliance
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About Toll Group

Toll Group is the Asia-Pacific region's largest provider of transport and logistics services.

Each day we travel a distance equivalent to the moon and back.



INTERNATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

1,200+
SITES ACROSS
50 COUNTRIES



1000's
OF SCHEDULED &
CHARTERED SERVICES
EVERYDAY OF THE WEEK



GLOBAL
NETWORK OF
ROAD, AIR, RAIL
& SEA ROUTES



3,000,000m²
GLOBAL
WAREHOUSING
FOOTPRINT



44,000+
EMPLOYEES
GLOBALLY



Research Impetus

In anticipation of 26C project designed to:

- quantify the incidence of on-road and driver fatalities at Toll Group from 1 July 2007 to 31 December 2016
- identify characteristics, patterns, anomalies in the data
- suggest preventative actions

- **6 key findings presented to our leadership team**
- **Now placing much of the information in the public domain**
- **Confidential briefings to government/road safety bodies/peak industry associations**
- **In this presentation I will focus on suicide by truck**



26C: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR TOLL?

In October 2018 the Heavy Vehicle National Law Amendment Act came into effect. The Amendment Act applies in all Australian states and territories except Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

The Act is concerned with vehicles 4.5 tonne and above, and with activities associated with those vehicles. However, the principles outlined below can be applied to all transport activities.

One of the important changes is the introduction of a primary duty. The primary duty (also known as "26C") reads as follows:

(1) Each party in the chain of responsibility for a heavy vehicle must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety of the party's transport activities relating to the vehicle.

(2) Without limiting subsection (1), each party must, so far as is reasonably practicable—

(a) eliminate public risks and, to the extent it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate public risks, minimise the public risks; and

(b) ensure the party's conduct does not directly or indirectly cause or encourage—

(i) the driver of the heavy vehicle to contravene this Law; or

(ii) the driver of the heavy vehicle to exceed a speed limit applying to the driver; or

(iii) another person, including another party in the chain of responsibility, to contravene this Law.

(3) For subsection (2)(b), the party's conduct includes, for example—

(a) the party asking, directing or requiring another person to do, or not do, something; and

(b) the party entering into a contract—

(i) with another person for the other person to do, or not do, something; or

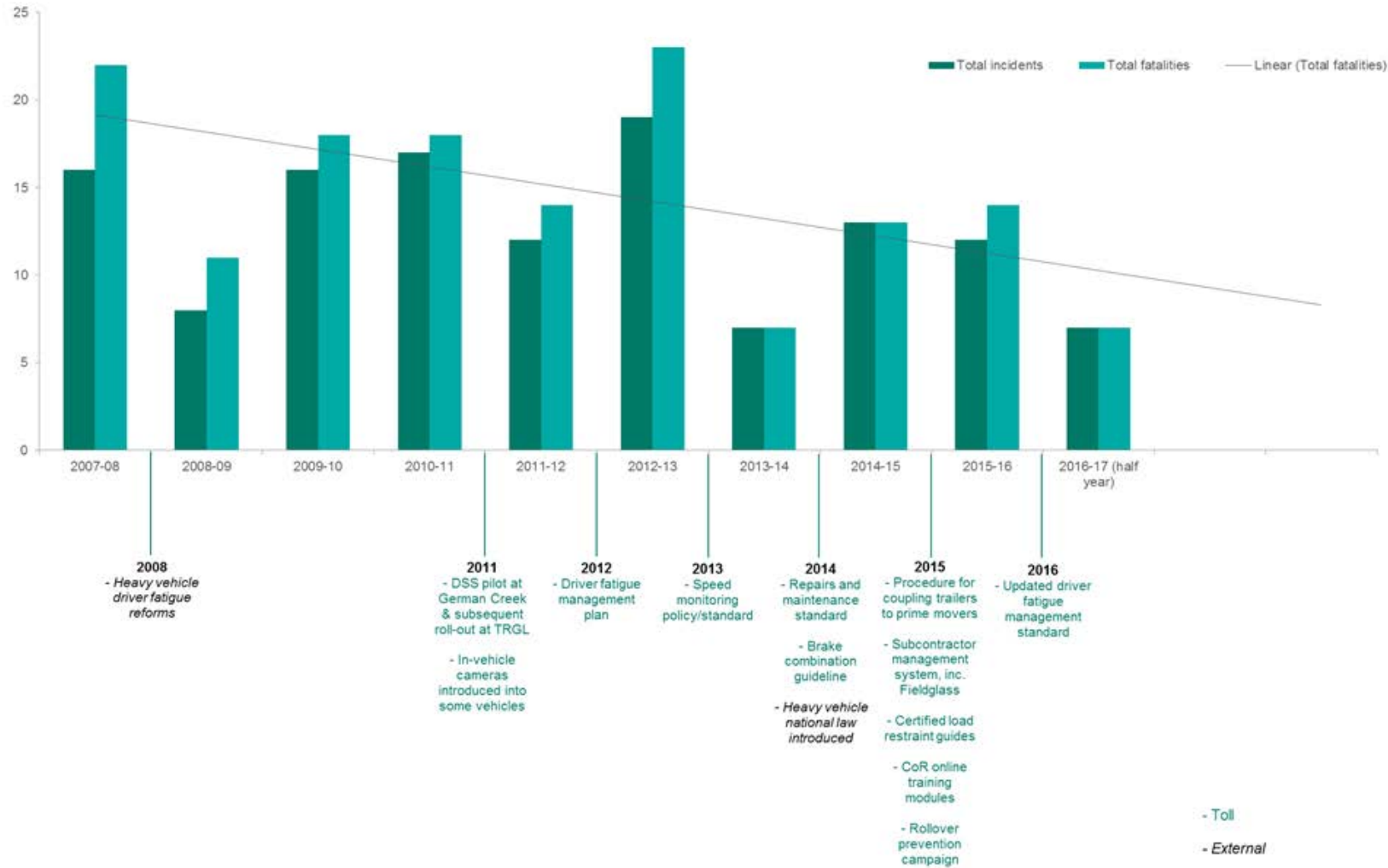
(ii) that purports to annul, exclude, restrict or otherwise change the effect of this Law.

There's a lot to unpack in these three short paragraphs, so let's take it section by section.

Content warning

U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Disaster Distress Helpline at 800-985-5990 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (8255)

On-Road and Driver Fatalities Trend (all causes)



Summary

1 July 2007 – 31 December 2016:

- 147 fatalities arising from 127 incidents
- 97 fatal incidents resulting in 117 fatalities (non-work related fatalities and suicides by truck removed from the data)

Overall trend is downwards:

- 2010/11 – 1 employee* died for every **29 million kms** travelled
- 2015/16 – 1 employee* died for every **116 million kms** travelled

Finding: Suicide by truck

- **Where a third party intentionally places themselves in the truck's path and is confirmed as suicidally ideated by the coroner, the police and/or the insurer**
- **14% (63% pedestrian, 32% car, 5% motorcyclist)**
- **Almost certainly an underestimate**
 - Coroner's court presumption against suicide
 - Evidence for motor vehicle crash being:
 - '[T]he preferred method for disguising suicidal intent as an accident... This has the benefit of saving the decedent's family from the stigma of suicide'*
 - Routley, Staines, Brennan et al, "Suicide and natural deaths in road traffic – review", MUARC, August 2003
- **Vehicular suicides are a hidden phenomenon**
 - removed from the road toll and not separately reported
 - UK Parliament produced only large-scale investigation of vehicular suicides on roads in 2017
 - between 15 and 41 suicides occurred on England's roads each year for the period 2001 to 2014
- **Subverts current road safety thinking**

Finding: Suicide by truck

- **Our estimate is closer to 20% of the fatalities with which we are involved**

- The Department of Vehicle Safety at the Chalmers University of Technology studied 379 fatal crashes involving heavy goods vehicles in Sweden. This included 65 crashes (**17%**) classified as suicides all of which were head-on collisions. (Balint, Fagerlind, Martinsson et al, *Accident analysis for traffic safety aspects of High Capacity Transport*, May 2014)
- NTI interrogation of multi-vehicle fatal crashes in 2017, 37.5% were either indicated or strongly-indicated as suicide; with **20.8%** being strongly indicated.

- **Part of a larger issue of suicide by road**

Table 1: Annual frequency of road related suicides by method, Victoria 2008 2017.

Method	Year (2000s)										Total
	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
Jump	21	13	11	3	3	5	8	3	11	8	86
Pedestrian	5	8	6	7	6	2	8	8	9	8	67
Single vehicle	5	4	2	5	2	6	3	7	7	4	45
Multiple vehicle	-	-	4	-	1	1	1	6	1	1	15
<i>Total</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>213</i>

- **Near-misses are unquantified**

What impact is this having on our drivers?

- Our drivers are generally the first responder
- Media responses not always balanced

Post-traumatic stress disorder – quote from Toll’s Head Chaplain

“While not all people affected following an incident go on to receive a formal diagnosis of Post-traumatic stress disorder the signs associated with this condition and the symptoms experienced by the employees (and often their families) would imply this is the case.

Intrusive memories, flashbacks, situational avoidance, sleeplessness, irritability, mood changes, sense of self blame and other conditions associated with PTSD are all described in discussion with drivers (families) and other affected employees.

Early and effective intervention appears to reduce the impact of these symptoms and provides the opportunity to return to ‘normal’ or acceptance of the event”.

If we are serious about fitness for duty and driver health and wellbeing we must recognize suicide by truck as an occupational hazard.

Suicide by truck and cameras

Of the 18 confirmed suicides by truck, 6 occurred in Queensland

- Suicide rates in Queensland tend to be about 15% higher than Australian rates (Griffith University Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention, *Suicide in Queensland's Commercial Building and Construction Industry*, 2006)
- Early adoption of cameras in Queensland may be a factor in over-representation

So what can we do?

Toll cannot solve this issue unilaterally - what capacity do we have to influence a community/society mental health issue?

- The Werther effect
 - Mindframe
- Placed the issue on the national agenda – National Road Safety Partnership Program Working Group
- Our goal: incident and injury free
- Our obligation to our drivers and their mental health and wellbeing
- Strengthen our resolve re use of cameras
 - “For drivers, the system can give them peace of mind and show that there really was nothing they could do under those circumstances” (“Suicide by Truck”, part II Overdrive, 11 August 2015)

Recommendations for any story about suicide



Minimise details about method and location

Studies have shown that explicit or technical descriptions and images of methods⁴³ or locations⁴⁴ used for suicide have been linked to increased rates of suicide. Some recommendations are provided below.

Issue ?	Options to Consider ?
Reporting explicit detail about method has been linked to increases in both use of that method and overall suicide rates. ⁴⁵	➔ If it is important to mention the method, discuss in general terms only, e.g. use ‘cocktail of drugs’ instead of detailing the type and quantity of medications taken.
Reporting uncommon or new methods of suicide can lead to imitation as well as a lasting impact on rates. ⁴⁶	➔ Remove specific details about new or unusual methods of suicide and references to ways further information can be obtained about these methods, e.g. <i>online</i> .
Describing locations of suicide may promote these to vulnerable people and increase the frequency of attempts at these sites. ⁴⁷	➔ If it is important to refer to a location, describe this in general terms only, e.g. use ‘at a nearby park’ instead of detailing the exact location. In advocacy stories (e.g. around safety at a specific site) limit the number of times the location is described in detail or mentioned in each report.
Images or footage that depicts the method or location of a suicide can lead to imitation by vulnerable people. ⁴⁸	➔ Avoid the use of detailed or dramatic photographs or footage, e.g. <i>images of people standing on ledges or of implements used in a suicide attempt</i> .

The Rail Experience: TrackSafe

- Launched 2012
- Registered charity
- Estimate 150 suicides per year and significant near-misses
- 30% incidents occur at stations

Programs of interest to Toll:

(1) Suicide prevention package for rail station staff

- For every 6 people who are suicidally ideated, if you can deter for 15 minutes only 1 will re-attempt
- Can we apply this thinking to truck stops and known hot-spots?

(2) Trauma management

We have now entered into a formal partnership with TrackSafe and are adapting their programs

Closing Remarks

- Vehicular suicide is hidden and so is not receiving an adequate policy response
- Subverts the current road safety paradigm
- We have an obligation to our drivers to recognize suicide by truck as an occupational hazard
- We partnered with TrackSafe to deliver resilience and trauma management support
- Evidence suggests that the Werther effect can be overcome
- This is a complex issue that requires a multi-sectoral approach

Questions and Comments

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