



Owner-Operator's Business
Association of Canada
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*...from the
director's chair*

Has fake news come to trucking?

Nothing gets me more wound up than shocking headlines that misrepresent our industry. We're already fighting mistaken public perception and negative stereotyping, much of it perpetrated by careless and ill-informed mainstream media reporting.

But when the alarming headlines are fed to the media by those who have access to the facts, it's doubly disturbing.

In mid-June, the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) teamed up with other law enforcement agencies for Operation Corridor, the annual 24-hour inspection blitz for trucks, and not surprisingly just about every media outlet, from national networks to small regional papers, picked up OPP's press release and ran shocking headlines: "Transport trucks involved in one in five crashes on Ontario roads" and "Transport truck-related collisions take a toll on human life," were two of the more popular renderings.

But the kicker? The OPP's press release with its list of "deadly and dangerous" truck-related accident statistics was issued before the blitz even took place. Moreover, I'm having a hard time reconciling the OPP numbers with data published each year in the Ontario Road Safety Annual Report (ORSAR). I learned all about playing around with statistics at MBA school, but even allowing for subtle nuancing of words and phrases that the media rarely picks up (ie. fatal collisions vs. fatalities, OPP-patrolled roads vs. other roads in the province, crashes involving, not caused, by trucks), some things just don't add up.

The OPP press release states that between 2012 and 2016, 330 people were killed in ac-

cidents involving heavy trucks, or as they put it, a transport truck was involved in one-fifth (or 20%) of all fatal collisions in Ontario.

According to ORSAR reports over the same five-year period, there were 2,589 people killed on Ontario roads. By my math, trucks were involved in 12.75% of those collisions, but hey, what's a percentage point here or there? Even if the OPP stats are accurate, they could just as easily have said that 80% of all fatal collisions in Ontario did not involve transport trucks.

Another disturbing statement made by an OPP spokesperson is that recent data show a "significant number of collisions were caused by transport trucks in poor operating condition." Again, according to the 2014 ORSAR report (the most recent final report available), only 4% of large trucks involved in fatal crashes had any apparent defect that may have contributed to the crash. The number was also 4% for 2013, and zero for 2012.

By OPP's numbers, over the past three years, six people died and 37 people were injured in crashes involving transport trucks in poor operating condition. Given that over 69,000 vehicles were involved in fatal and personal injury crashes last year alone, I question the implication that the number of unsafe trucks on the road may be responsible for a "significant number" of crashes.

Don't get me wrong. I applaud law enforcement for every errant truck driver they reprimand or educate, and every unsafe truck they take off the road. I'm also in favor of campaigns targeting local trucks that don't usually take highways and thus bypass the scales, the trucks of local



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tradespeople, say, or dump truckers who don't even consider themselves part of the "trucking industry."

But when an OPP spokesperson gleefully announces that "We're going to be targeting commercial motor vehicles in order to help keep our highways safe," I despair. And thousands of people on Ontario's roads who risk death or injury by 80% of vehicles other than trucks certainly aren't getting their tax-dollars' worth of protection.

There's no question that in any collision between a truck and a smaller vehicle, the smaller one is usually the loser, so measures to lessen the number of trucks involved in accidents is not the problem. In fact, I've long been a proponent of giving law enforcement the resources they need to get the truly unsafe drivers and vehicles off the road.

But wouldn't road safety be better served if the headlines told the real story? For example, in those fatalities "involving" large trucks, the truck driver is more likely to be driving properly than the other drivers (involved in the same crashes) more than 75% of the time.

Rather than fueling public angst and motorists' fear of big trucks, more reliable media reporting could go a long way toward educating "four wheelers" and others on how to share the road with big trucks.