

5 reasons to prioritise safety for freight transport

According to the latest data from the South African Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC), the country continues to grapple with alarmingly high freight road accident rates, with more than 4,600 fatal crashes involving freight vehicles. These numbers not only represent a staggering loss of life but also have profound economic and social implications.

By [Pieter Vermeulen](#) 4 Oct 2023



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Road freight accidents also have substantial economic repercussions, costing the nation billions annually. According to the South African Road Federation, these accidents account for more than R140bn in direct and indirect costs every year. The financial burden includes expenses related to medical care, vehicle repairs, lost productivity, and legal proceedings.

Furthermore, the World Health Organization reported that South Africa had an annual road traffic fatality rate in excess of 25.1 per 100,000 people, highlighting the human toll of these accidents.

This rate is significantly higher than in many other countries, including those in Europe and North America, where road safety measures and infrastructure are generally more advanced. In the US, for example, the rate is less than 12.5 per 100,000, while European countries are significantly lower, at 2.8 and 2.9 for Sweden and the UK respectively.

Addressing road safety therefore remains a critical challenge for South Africa's economic and social well-being.

Prioritising safety

Safety isn't just another box to check – it's the very foundation on which our industry stands. It protects lives, builds trust, safeguards the environment, and ensures long-term sustainability. That's why prioritising safety is not just a choice; it's an ethical and professional responsibility.

Protecting lives. Safety measures and adherence to compliance standards are paramount for one fundamental reason – they save lives. In South Africa, the business of freight transport is filled with unpredictable variables, from weather conditions to congested traffic, broken infrastructure and even unforeseen events like social unrest.

By implementing rigorous safety protocols, freight companies can reduce the risk of accidents and minimise the potential harm to drivers, the public, and the environment.

Unfortunately, the problem is exacerbated in South Africa, with many smaller operators tending to get away with under-compliance, while some larger operators over-compensate by over-regulating themselves.

There needs to be stricter control of compliance breaches, and clients would be well advised to only partner with reputable operators who are members of the Road Freight Association.

Reputation and trust. Reputation is everything in road freight. By prioritising safety and compliance, freight companies work towards building a solid reputation as reliable partners. Clients and partners value this reliability and expect their goods to be transported safely, on time, and without incident.

Legal and financial consequences. Failing to comply with safety regulations and standards can also have dire legal and financial repercussions. Non-compliance may lead to hefty fines, protracted legal battles, or even the revocation of license.

When freight companies invest in safety and compliance, it acts as a shield, protecting people from potential liabilities and securing their future. This not just helps them meet legal requirements but also safeguards their bottom line. In the long run, adherence to safety standards is an investment in financial stability and business longevity.

Environmental stewardship. Transporting dangerous goods carries inherent environmental risks. However, adhering to safety and compliance standards significantly reduces the likelihood of spills, leaks, or other environmental disasters. By doing their part to minimise environmental risks, freight companies can actively contribute to sustainable practices and protect our natural environment.

This isn't just about avoiding costly environmental clean-up operations, it's about preserving the planet for future generations.

Employee wellbeing. Commitment to safety and compliance is paramount for employee wellbeing. A work environment where safety comes first boosts morale, enhances job satisfaction and reduces the likelihood of accidents or injuries.

Freight drivers and employees aren't just workers, they're the backbone of their organisations. By investing in their safety, freight companies cultivate a culture of professionalism and responsibility that extends across the industry.

Beyond the tragic loss of life, accidents involving freight vehicles have far-reaching consequences. They lead to significant disruptions in the supply chain, increased insurance costs, and damage to a company's reputation. Moreover, safety concerns also impact employee morale and productivity, making it imperative for freight companies to prioritise safety.

South African freight companies must continue to invest in stringent safety measures, employee training, and vehicle maintenance to mitigate these risks and contribute to safer roads for all. Moreover, they should be striving to apply for global industry certifications as part of this process.

This is not just lip service, certifications help to shift the focus of freight operators towards holistic management and safety improvements, with the ultimate goal of attaining a net zero accident rate.

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