

INJURY PREVENTION FOR CDL DRIVERS

COURSE OUTLINE

- **Almost every day you see images in the news of a horrific accident on the highway, many of them involving large trucks.**
 - But did you know that most of the injuries that CDL drivers suffer aren't a result of collisions at all?
- **It's the incidents that occur inside and around your truck... hooking up a trailer, loading and unloading cargo, just getting in and out of the cab... that are more likely to lead to an injury.**
- **Many things can cause them, such as:**
 - Putting yourself in an awkward position.
 - Lifting a heavy object.
 - "Overextending" your reach.
 - Slipping or falling.
 - Being struck by your cargo.
 - Being crushed by your truck itself.
- **Every year almost 10% of truck drivers suffer from an injury serious enough that they have to miss work for an extended period of time.**
 - And this can cause both the driver and their company a lot of pain... physically and financially.
- **But there are things that you can do to help prevent these injuries.**
- **The process of getting in and out of a cab seems pretty straightforward, but that doesn't mean that you can't get hurt doing it.**
- **A truck's cab can be higher off the ground than you think, and it's easy to slip or even fall getting in and out of it... especially in inclement weather.**
 - When entering and exiting you should face the cab at all times.
 - Facing away can be awkward, and result in a significant injury.
- **Always follow the "three point rule"... having at least two hands and a foot or two feet and a hand in contact with the steps and handholds on the cab at all times.**

- **What you are wearing can make a difference too.**
 - A good pair of safety shoes will give you a better grip on the steps and other surfaces that your feet encounter.
- **A vest with pockets is also a good idea.**
 - You should never climb with anything in your hands, so the pockets will allow you to safely carry that snack or paperback that you're taking with you.
- **Some drivers have the bad habit of jumping down when they leave their cabs.**
 - It may seem like it's only a short way to the ground, but every time you jump your legs and back take a lot of punishment.
 - Even if they don't immediately cause an injury, over time your "jumps" will catch up to you.
- **Once you are in a cab, staying comfortable and injury-free when you're behind the wheel begins with your posture.**
 - You want to sit so that your back and shoulders are firmly against the seat.
- **If necessary, move the seat forward in order to reach the steering wheel and pedals comfortably.**
 - You don't want to slump or lean towards the wheel while you're driving.
 - It can strain your lower back.
- **Once you're situated, make sure to fasten your seat belt.**
 - It should be second nature.
 - But with the big, comfortable seats in many trucks now-a-days it can be easy to forget.
- **If you're a driving couple or team, remember, you should never move around in a cab while your truck is moving.**
 - Lots of truckers do it, but that doesn't make it right.
- **Moving from your seat into a sleeper can be distracting to your partner.**
 - You both are extremely vulnerable if you should have to make a sudden stop or "course" correction.
 - You could actually become a "pinball" within the cab, injuring yourself as well as the driver.

- **Even with good posture, sitting for along hours can still create significant pressure on your muscles.**
 - Eventually you may start to feel your back and neck stiffen.
 - Over time the discomfort can worsen and even become painful.
- **That's why it's important to organize your schedule so that you can stop every few hours and take a break.**
 - It doesn't have to be long.
 - Get out of your cab and move around.
 - Stretch out your entire body.
 - To get blood flowing take a brief walk.
- **While you're stopped, use the opportunity to do some limbering exercises as well.**
 - Bring your knees up to your chest or do some "pelvic tilts".
 - This can help keep you and your back in good condition.
- **But good posture and exercise can only help you so much if you're not getting enough rest.**
 - If you are tired, your reflexes will be slowed and your mind won't be able to make the quick decisions that can be required as you drive.
- **In addition, the longer that you put off sleep, the more likely you are to develop health problems such as diabetes and high blood pressure... even have a stroke or heart attack.**
- **Believe it or not, even your diet can play a part in avoiding injuries.**
 - You need to stay in good shape to withstand the rigors that life as a CDL driver can involve.
- **So you want to avoid the junk food and snacks, as well as starchy foods such as potatoes, pasta and white rice.**
 - Too much coffee, soda and energy drink aren't good for you either.
- **Focus on food with healthy fats and protein (a modest amount of carbs is okay too).**
 - Have an apple or some celery with peanut butter for a snack.
- **CDL drivers spend most of their time in two types of trucks...**
 - Box trucks and trailers.

- **There are a number of potential hazards that can be encountered with the bodies of both types of trucks, including getting in and out and moving around in them.**
- **If you aren't at a loading dock, getting into the body of a truck can pose several problems.**
 - Just opening it up can be difficult.
- **If your truck has a roll-up door it can take a lot of strength to push it up and out of the way, and you can easily pull or strain a muscle doing it.**
 - So keeping the tracks and rollers lubricated is important.
 - You also need to make sure that you are firmly positioned before you "lift".
- **If your truck has swinging doors you need to watch out for "pinch points".**
 - It can be easy to catch a finger or hand as you open and close them.
 - That can result in serious damage.
- **Many truck bodies are high off the ground, so you have to "pull yourself up" to get into them, typically standing on the rear bumper.**
 - This can create potential slip and fall problems, especially in bad weather.
- **Just like entering a cab, you should face the inside of the body and follow the "three point rule".**
 - Keep at least one hand and two feet or two hands and one foot in contact with the truck at all times.
 - If there is a "grab-bar" on the side of the truck, use it!
- **As you move around inside the truck, watch out for loose floorboards and protruding nails.**
 - Pay attention to any load you are carrying as well.
 - It can be easy to trip over cargo that is low to the floor or dislodge something that could fall on you.
- **Exiting a truck's body you want to use the entry process in reverse, keeping at least three points of contact at all times.**

- **Never jump down out of a truck.**
 - That can create multiple problems.
 - You could lose your balance and fall.
 - Even if you do it "safely", jumping puts tremendous pressure on your spine, which can lead to significant back problems.
- **Tractor-trailers come with two other types of hazards that can cause serious injuries, both associated with coupling and uncoupling the trailer from the cab.**
 - The first involves how and where the trailer is parked.
 - Try to keep it on level ground if possible.
 - Make sure the wheels are chocked and the parking brake is set.
- **A lot of drivers have been hurt when their trailers have rolled forward and collapsed.**
- **When you are hitching up pay particular attention to the "fifth wheel" hitch itself.**
 - It needs to be in good condition and prepared to accept a trailer safely or you could really be in trouble when you try to couple the trailer onto it.
 - The last thing you want is for the trailer to slip and come crashing down on you.. or break loose later, on the highway.
- **Start by thoroughly inspecting the hitch for cracks or damaged moving parts.**
 - Worn liners should be replaced.
 - The hitch should be lubricated as well.
- **Be careful when pulling the kingpin.**
 - Make sure you are firmly positioned and using a puller that will minimize the strain on your arms and back.
- **The "landing gear" is the other part of the truck's body that has the potential to injure you.**
- **While a landing gear's mechanism is designed to leverage your own strength, if your body isn't positioned correctly or you're not using good technique, raising and lowering your truck's legs can result in a serious injury.**

- **Studies have shown that it is safer to stand facing the trailer when you are cranking, especially when you're raising the legs.**
 - This allows you to use more of your overall body strength than standing "sideways" and pushing on the crank does.
 - It also lessens the risk of your hand slipping off the handle and you hitting the ground or having the hand recoil and hit you!
- **Many of the pick-ups and deliveries that a CDL driver does are at "loading docks".**
 - They come with their own set of hazards.
- **First, they can be very busy places.**
 - There can be lots of people and equipment in constant motion, all trying to do their jobs while staying out of each other's way.
- **Avoiding injuries at a dock begins when you are "backing up".**
- **Being aware of your environment is critical.**
 - Is there anything or anyone behind you as you back in?
 - If you don't have a clear view in your mirrors, get out and look.
- **You need to be sure that you are properly aligned with the dock as well.**
 - Are you flush with the dock when you stop?
 - Are you in a position so that you can use any built-in restraints or "dock locks"?
- **Once you're positioned correctly, you need to...**
 - Shut off your engine.
 - Put on the brakes.
 - Engage restraints or dock locks.
 - Check your wheels.
- **All of this will help prevent two dangerous situations, "trailer creep" and "trailer pop".**
- **"Trailer creep" is when a trailer moves forward as a result of the activity inside, such as a forklift moving in and out and exerting forward pressure.**
 - This can eventually create a space between the trailer and the dock.

- **"Trailer pop" is also caused by a heavy forward pressure.**
 - In this case it pushes the trailer so hard that the legs collapse and the nose of the trailer drops to the ground.
 - This opens up as space between the dock as well.
- **Both "trailer creep" and "trailer pop" can result in people and equipment dropping into the openings that have been created.**
- **If you are going to be dropping your trailer at a dock, you should set the trailer's legs so that the floor of the trailer is as level as possible.**
 - Using fixed jacks for additional support and stability can be a good idea as well.
- **If you and your cab are staying at the dock while you are being loaded or unloaded some facilities may take away your keys and ask you to go to a designated "waiting room".**
- **This helps to guard against two other situations that can cause you or other people harm.**
 - Having you get hit by other vehicles or equipment in the area.
 - A "drive-away", where you pull away from the dock while people and equipment are still in and around your trailer, or restraints are still in place.
- **Depending on the location, it is not unusual for a driver to at least help with loading and unloading their cargo, if not having to do it all themselves.**
 - In these situations if you are at a loading dock you need to pay attention to the conditions on the dock itself, especially if it's exposed to the weather.
 - Make sure that it isn't slippery and that any debris has been cleared off, so that you don't run the risk of slipping or tripping.
 - Check for cracks or other damage to the dock's surface , as well as uneven spots that could cause a forklift or pallet jack to tip.
- **Make sure that dock plates and levelers are in good shape and positioned correctly as well.**
 - These situations could cause equipment or cargo to come off a pallet and land on you!

- **To pick something up...**
 - Get as close to the object as possible.
 - Bend at the knees.
 - Keep your elbows and arms close to your body.
 - Keep your back straight.
 - Get a good grasp.
 - Bring the object into your chest.
 - Lift with your legs.
- **Don't twist while you're lifting or as you walk.**
 - Turn with your feet instead.
 - To put the object down, just reverse your movements, bending at the knees to get it to its resting place.
- **Many of your loads will be "palletized" and you won't have to handle objects individually at all.**
 - Often what you will need to use in these cases is a pallet jack.
 - Check out the jack without a load first.
 - Make sure the hydraulics are working correctly and it is holding its position when the forks are elevated.
- **You want to do a quick check of your truck as well.**
 - Are available restraints and dock locks in place?
 - Are dock plates securely positioned as well?
 - If you're driving a tractor trailer is the landing gear stable and any jacks that you are using set up correctly?
 - Look to see if there are any problems with the floor of the truck, such as splintered wood or protruding screw or nails.
- **You also want to be sure that you're wearing safety shoes or boots.**
 - You don't want your toes to be unprotected.
 - It's a good idea to wear good work gloves to protect your hands as well.
- **At this point you are ready to start moving the cargo.**
 - Center the pallet jack's forks on the pallet and lift.
 - Whenever possible, push the jack rather than pull it.
 - Pulling a lot of weight can put a significant strain on your back.

- **In a box truck or an enclosed trailer you should position pallets next to each other, as close to in the nose as possible.**
 - This will provide extra support for the load if you have to suddenly stop or swerve.
 - On a flatbed you will probably want to "balance" the load toward the center, especially for heavy cargo.
- **If you are using a powered pallet jack, "walkie stacker" or a forklift, the same general rules apply.**
 - A forklift will take more room to maneuver, so make sure that you have enough clearance side to side.
 - It's easy to get "squeezed" between pallets or the sides of the truck, which can be really painful!
 - Keep loads as low as possible, both for stability and to avoid hitting the top of your truck's door opening, which can send cargo cascading back at you.
- **If you have a flatbed or cargo that needs extra stabilization in an enclosed trailer, you will need to tie it down.**
 - Be sure to use the anchor-points that are built into the trailer.
 - "Jury-rigging" your straps can be a rod to disaster.
 - Make sure straps are in good condition, with no cuts or frays.
 - You should position yourself so that you are well-balanced when you pull on the straps, so that you don't slip or pull a muscle.
- **Some trucks are equipped with "liftgates" to make loading and unloading easier when you aren't at a loading dock.**
 - Be careful when using a liftgate (all that force can do damage to a body as well as to cargo).
 - First inspect it to verify that it isn't damaged.
 - Keep your hands and arms away from the "pinch-points" that are between the liftgate and your truck's body or are in a "two-part" liftgate itself.
- **Position the load as close to the center of the liftgate as possible.**
 - Too close to the outside and the load could fall off as it is being raised.
 - Too close to the inside and the truck body itself could knock the load off, sending cargo back at you.

- **If you are using a pallet jack to get the cargo onto and off of the liftgate, and want to have them "ride" together, make sure the jack is completely on the gate, not overhanging it.**
 - Many times it's better to make two trips, one with pallet and another with the pallet jack.
- **Highways and loading docks aren't the only places you can get injured if you are a CDL driver.**
 - The "yards" at many pick-up and delivery points can also be hazardous.
- **While we have all seen pictures of giant warehouses with long rows of loading doors and big, expansive yards, most yards are small, tight spaces... which can create a number of opportunities for injuries.**
- **The most common problem is collisions, with...**
 - Other trucks.
 - Forklifts.
 - People.
- **So being aware of everything that is in the yard is important.**
 - Make sure that you can be seen as well, and that your headlights, tail lights and flashers are all working.
- **When you arrive in a yard be sure to have your seatbelt on (you could get hit by another driver).**
 - Make sure you know where you are supposed to go.
 - Look for directional signs and posted speed limits.
 - Pay attention to all of them!
- **Keep your eyes peeled for obstacles and debris as well.**
 - You don't want to end up with a "jarring" encounter (or a flat tire).
- **As you maneuver your truck take care not to pull in behind another truck that is backing up.**
 - They always have the right-of-way.
 - Make sure you know where any equipment and people are in the surrounding area.

- **When you exit your truck it's a good idea to wear a reflective safety vest or other bright clothing so that fellow drivers and warehouse workers can see you.**
 - Watch where you're going.
 - Don't walk behind other trucks or forklifts.
 - Check in with the shipping or receiving office immediately, or go to the designated driver "waiting area", if there is one.
 - Don't loiter.

*** * * SUMMARY * * ***

- **As we have seen, most injuries that CDL drivers experience occur when they are "off the road". But there are things that you can do to prevent them.**
- **Every year almost 10% of CDL drivers suffer from an injury that is serious enough that they miss work for an extended period of time.**
- **Slips, trips and falls are the most common injuries that truck drivers suffer.**
- **In the cab, good posture and positioning your seat correctly are the keys to preventing neck and back strain.**
- **Jumping in and out of your truck can cause serious damage to your spine.**
- **At a loading dock watch out for cluttered or slippery surfaces and situations like "trailer creep" as well as "trailer pop".**
- **If you are loading or unloading your truck yourself, make sure you have the proper equipment... and use it carefully.**
- **Being a CDL driver can be a dangerous business. But by knowing the hazards that you face and following good safety practices, you can return from every trip safe and sound!**