



Underride ... The Danger That Decapitates

by Byron Bloch • Sullivan High Class of June 1955

As you zoom along the highways and expressways around Chicago or anywhere in our nation, do you get anxious when you're following behind or alongside a massive tractor-trailer. And if destiny or a slick road or a lane shifting event occurred, might your car or SUV crash into and even beneath that giant truck?

These are called "truck underride" accidents, in which the passenger vehicle crashes into and underrides beneath the tall rear or side of a big truck. The trailer body smashes through the windshield and rips back the roof, penetrating deeply into the passenger compartment "survival space" and negating the safety benefits of seatbelts and airbags. The injuries are severe or fatal, and sometimes the driver and passengers are decapitated.

As a court-qualified expert in auto safety design and vehicle crash-worthiness, I've consulted and testified in many court cases over the years on behalf of the accident victims, and I've long been fighting for safer guards to be required on all large trucks and trailers so as to prevent future tragedies.



Rear and side underride accidents kill over 400 Americans each year.

NHTSA was established in 1966, and one of its first rule-making efforts was for underride guards for trucks, trailers, and buses. The trucking industry has been fighting the rule-making from its inception. Ironically, the Truck Trailer Manufacturers Association (TTMA) back in 1970 stated that they could make adequate rear underride guards to withstand at least 50,000 lbs. resistive force, but they lobbied for a delay. Corporate influence on politics intervened, with President Nixon postponing many vehicle safety rules, and underride guards were delayed. When the Carter administration tried to re-start the underride guard rule-making, the following Reagan administration put it all "on hold"... so nothing was done for 21 years, 1970 to 1991, due to inhumane political schemes..

Because of this tragic 20-year delay (while victims died), I urged Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder to include truck underride in her December 1991 Hearings on "Automotive Safety: Are We Doing Enough to Protect America's Families?" I testified at the Hearings about truck underride

hazards and how to help resolve the issue, prompting Rep. Schroeder to demand that NHTSA finally issue a standard.

However, when NHTSA issued the new Standards FMVSS 223 and 224 in 1995, they required a minimal strength of only 22,480 lbs., and the guard could be up to 22 inches above the ground, and its full strength did not extend across the entire rear of the trailer. Large trucks were

excluded because, in NHTSA's bizarre rationale, only 25-percent of underride fatalities involved trucks. These safety standard rear guards were thus too weak, too high above the ground, and not full-width. The underride deaths and severe injuries continued, despite the NHTSA requirement... which by law is only a minimum. And there was no requirement for any side guards at all. This was like condoning reckless homicide by truck and trailer manufacturers!

NHTSA is now, in Spring 2016, considering an upgrade for rear guards on trailers, but only to go from a 30 mph up to a 35 mph crash requirement by a mid-size car. What is urgently needed are rear and side underride prevention guards that can withstand a crash test at 50-mph-plus by a full-size car, impacting directly at 90-degrees and in offset and angular crashes into the rear and side guards, with no intrusion into the passenger vehicle's "survival space".

Think this is too tough to do? Well, way back in 1970, NHTSA funded car-into-trailer crash tests, and showed how to design a safe guard for 40 mph crash protection. Then in 1977, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) did a series of car-into-trailer crash tests, and showed how a strong guard prevents underride. Then, in 1980, another NHTSA-funded car-into-trailer crash test series recommended how to design guards for 40- mph-plus protection. All of this was ignored when NHTSA finally mandated a Federal Safety Standard in 1995 for (hold on!) only 30 mph protection



More than 200 Americans are killed each year in side underride accidents.

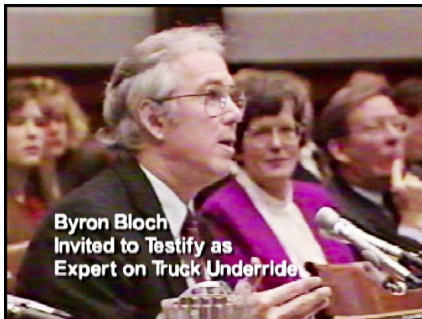


In 2001, I went to England to examine side guards on trailers. There, but not here.

And let me mention that many European nations have required side underride guards since the 1980's and they've proven effective in many accident scenarios, but still could be made stronger. Yes, America is a third-rate nation when it comes to protecting its citizens from truck underride tragedies... needlessly weak rear guards, and no side guards at all. And the industry reacts with callous indifference!

So to sum up... In the U.S., about 225 fatalities occur per year in rear underride accidents, and about 200-plus for side underride tragedies. After stupid delays, what we need is for all trucks and trailers to be designed or equipped to prevent the rear and side underride hazards, at least at a 50 mph crash performance level. If America moves expeditiously, we can eliminate virtually all underride deaths and severe injuries. It's called "Vision Zero" ... the visionary goal of zero fatalities. I believe we can do it!

To learn more about truck underride, please visit my website at <http://www.AutoSafetyExpert.com>



I testified at 1991 Congressional Hearings on the need for rear and side guards.