

NEWS RELEASE

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Government needs to do more to ensure commercial vehicle safety

WINNIPEG – Manitoba's Department of Infrastructure needs to do more to ensure operators of heavy commercial vehicles on the province's roadways are operating safely, says Auditor General Norm Ricard. His findings are contained in a new report, *Oversight of Commercial Vehicle Safety*, released today.

"Heavy commercial vehicles provide many benefits," said Ricard. "But their size and loads present unique safety risks. Because they share the road with others, everyone's safety is affected."

The Auditor General's report notes that heavy commercial vehicles are over-represented in fatal collisions.

- Heavy commercial vehicles account for about 10% of all Manitoba-licensed vehicles. However, between 2014 and 2018, they were involved in 16% to 27% of Manitoba traffic collision fatalities (or about 20% on average).
- Manitoba's 2018 Traffic Collision Report showed that collisions involving commercial vehicles resulted in 11 deaths, 533 injuries (39 serious), property damage, and significant financial costs.

The audit assessed the Department's oversight of commercial vehicle safety and concluded it was inadequate. The Department regulates operators of heavy commercial vehicles by requiring them to have safety fitness certificates, and by conducting on-road inspections. Heavy commercial vehicles include semi-trucks and straight trucks greater than 4,500 kg.

Safety programs

The audit found that when the Department first issues a safety fitness certificate to an operator, it does not check the operator's safety knowledge or safety practices. "Better practices found in other

jurisdictions include administering safety-knowledge tests, reviewing applicants' safety plans, and performing site reviews," said Ricard.

The Auditor General found that the Department's ongoing monitoring and management of operators' safety performance was inadequate. Ricard said the method the Department uses to grade and assess operators' safety performance needs to be more rigorous. In particular, he noted that an operator's safety grade was not affected by failed inspections, that is inspections where noted deficiencies weren't considered serious enough to place the vehicle or driver out-of-service.

In addition, the Auditor General found that while the Department's process for determining when to apply follow-up interventions (such as facility audits and warning letters) casts a wide net, it still does not ensure all operators who pose the greatest risk to the public and are most in need of improvement receive some form of intervention. "This is because the process is based on operator rankings within pre-determined fleet size groupings rather than comparing all operators to a pre-determined standard that could be used to flag operators for a follow-up intervention. Such a standard could be the number of acceptable negative events per vehicle or per kilometer driven," said Ricard.

On-road inspections

Ricard also noted gaps in the management of on-road inspections. "Inspections play a vital role in ensuring commercial vehicle safety, as they can detect when a vehicle poses added risk to the public," he said. The audit found that the Department was unable to demonstrate that its staffing patterns maximize the percentage of commercial vehicle traffic subject to inspection and minimize the risk of predictability. For three major weigh stations, the audit found that almost half of all commercial truck traffic occurred when the weigh stations were closed. In addition, the Auditor General noted that both weigh station and mobile patrol hours were overly predictable. "This is important because too little coverage and too much predictability will allow unscrupulous operators to work around the Department's staffing patterns," said Ricard.

The audit also found that the Department was unable to demonstrate that existing inspection capacity was being fully and effectively used.

Planning and performance measurement

"The Department has an ambitious objective for the Motor Carrier Branch," Ricard said. "But as we have seen in many other audits, the Department's strategic planning processes to help ensure this objective is achieved need to be strengthened." The report found the Department has no performance measures to assess the effectiveness of its efforts to improve commercial vehicle safety. "Current performance measures focus on outputs, like the number vehicles inspected, as opposed to outcomes, which would include the percentage of operators with fully satisfactory safety fitness ratings, or the percentage of

commercial vehicles involved in fatal collisions,” Ricard added. Further, the Department had not sufficiently considered risks, data, and the need for coordination with Manitoba Public Insurance.

Ricard's report contains 17 recommendations. **To view the report, please visit** <http://www.oag.mb.ca/reports>.

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