Too tall?

Bridge strikes pose safety risks and they are expensive.

Let's face it: bridge strikes are a big deal. They're such a big deal, in fact, that the state of New York, according to TheDrive.com, has spent $4.3 million to install a number of new detectors aimed at keeping too-tall vehicles off state parkways, where overpasses are often lower than in other areas of the state.

It's not just New York that sees bridge strikes as a serious issue, though. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) also views bridge strikes as a serious safety hazard because they often result in injury and loss of life, damage to infrastructure, interruption of commerce and delays in travel times. FMCSA and most industry insiders believe that bridge strikes are avoidable by maintaining better awareness of route restrictions along travel paths; typically gained by paying closer attention to road signs, and by the use of only those electronic navigation systems (meaning GPS systems) intended for trucks and buses.

Not all GPS navigation systems are the same.

Some companies have learned this the hard way, but not all GPS navigation systems are the same. Many GPS systems are designed for smaller and lighter passenger vehicles, and don't take into consideration the height and weight of the vehicle. Professional truck and bus drivers should only use navigation systems intended for commercial vehicles because they provide truck and bus drivers with important route restrictions, such as low bridge overpasses.

For commercial vehicle GPS systems, FMCSA offers the following five tips:

1 Select an electronic navigation system intended for use by truck and bus drivers.

2 Before drivers begin their trip, they should type in all relevant information about their vehicles so the system can provide the appropriate route.

3 Follow the route recommended by the navigation system, but ALWAYS obey traffic signs and advisories (such as low bridge overpasses, axle weight limits, detour signs, variable message signs, etc.)

> "Take the time to evaluate your route and equipment before you turn the key. Bridge strikes are one area where it's absolutely possible to reduce your risk completely."

4 Do not engage in distracted driving! Avoid typing or entering addresses or information into the navigation system while driving.

5 If your navigation system does not provide automatic updates of the maps, be sure to obtain updates to ensure you are following the most current route planning information.

The reality is that bridge strikes don't just pose safety risks to drivers and the public; they're incredibly expensive, too. In addition to liability and property damage costs, the failure to comply with a posted route restriction carries a maximum penalty of $11,000 for a company and $2,750 for a driver. Penalties can vary based on the type of bridge (highway overpass, railroad, etc.).

Also, be sure to check your local, state and federal regulations, as they may require notification of a bridge strike to local authorities – i.e., state police, local police – and be aware: in the case of bridges with railroad crossings, additional reporting steps are necessary, including notifying the railroad authorities.

All this, of course, is avoidable. While there are certainly a lot of unknowns in trucking, your vehicle's height, width, and weight as well as accounting for your precise load and trailer specifications, don't fall into that category. Bridge strikes are one area where it's absolutely possible to reduce your risk completely.

Remember, if you use a navigation system that does not provide you with critical route restrictions, the shortcut you thought would save you time and fuel just might end up costing you a lot more than money. Take the time to evaluate your route and equipment before you turn the key. A little bit of preparation can go a long way. ■

THE AUTHOR

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EVENTS DIARY

September 26-28, 2018
SC&RA Crane & Rigging Workshop
Louisville, KY
www.scranet.org

October 2-4, 2018
Breakbulk Americas
Houston, TX
www.breakbulk.com

October 11, 2018
Lift & Move USA
NessCampbell Crane
Portland, OR
www.liftandmoveusa.com

October 14-17, 2018
AWRF Fall General Meeting
San Antonio, TX
www.awrf.org

November 29, 2018
Lift & Move USA
Superior Cranes
Rockingham, NC
www.liftandmoveusa.com

December 4-6, 2018
Power Gen
Orlando, FL
www.power-gen.com

January 3-6, 2019
SC&RA Board & Committee Meeting
Wailea, HI
www.scranet.org

January 22-25, 2019
World of Concrete
Las Vegas, NV
www.worldofconcrete.com/en/attendee.html

February 19-22, 2019
SC&RA Specialized Transportation Symposium
Westin Galleria Houston
Houston, TX
www.scranet.org

April 8-14, 2019
Bauma
Munich, Germany
www.bauma.de

April 23-27, 2019
SC&RA Annual Conference
Omni La Costa Resort
Carlsbad, CA
www.scranet.org