

# Transport Topics

11/7/2011 8:00:00 AM

## Opinion: Don't Jump!

By **Jena Williams**, *Research Investigator*  
and **Han Kim**, *Research Ergonomist*  
*Washington State Department of Labor and Industries*

This Opinion piece appears in the Nov. 7 print edition of Transport Topics. [Click here to subscribe today.](#)

Did you know that jumping from the cab of a semi, an average of about 4 feet, produces the same force to the body as being struck by a linebacker?

Most truckers know that falling off a trailer can result in a cracked skull, but they also need to know that knees, ankles, hips and backs also can be damaged by a jump from the cab — injuries that can make the difference between trucking as a long-term career or just a job for the young.

Preventing injuries hinges on making sure drivers are aware of the industry's "three points of contact" rule, in which three limbs of the body are always in contact with the handholds, steps or ladder when dismounting a truck or trailer — for example, two hands and one foot, or two feet and one hand.

In addition, the driver or worker should be facing the truck, as when climbing a ladder, instead of facing out, like going down a flight of stairs. This keeps the driver in the best position to avoid slipping or falling and allows him to be more prepared for conditions on the ground, i.e., holding on tight if he steps onto ice, snow or wet surfaces.

Trucking industry safety personnel do their best to drill these simple ideas into new hires. Veteran drivers already tend to use the three points of contact, possibly because they have sore knees to remind them when the safety specialist isn't around.

Research shows the average age of truck drivers in Washington state increased to 42 in 2005 from 39 in 1997. That change means experienced drivers are staying employed longer, but it also means young workers eventually will be needed to fill those jobs.

Workers' compensation statistics show that younger employees tend to have more injuries than their older colleagues, so it's important to train them well enough to stay on the job for the long haul — in both senses of those words.

Professional truck drivers have a difficult job. They go in and out of the cab during the pre-trip inspection, strap and inspect the stability of the load, and then spend hours driving in all kinds of traffic and weather conditions to get the load delivered in time. With all these things for them to think about, it is vital to get those "three points of contact" to stick in the minds of young professional drivers.

Falls both from an elevation and on the same level are the leading types of injuries in the trucking industry, where the average workers' compensation cost per claim constitutes one the largest in the industry. Falls result in sprains, strains, contusions, fractures, abrasions, ligament injuries, concussions and other serious injuries.

Younger drivers tend to ignore these risks, believing their agility, flexibility and strength will protect them. And while they may not feel the pain immediately from small or large injuries, the adverse effects will build up over time in even the strongest worker.

Too many young truckers eager to make a good impression erroneously believe faster is better. Reminders that conscientious work can help assure a long, healthy and successful career are vital to your long-term investment in your drivers.

The Trucking Injury Reduction Emphasis project, or TIRES, has developed simulation tools to help drive this message home. These simulation tools, which were developed with the understanding that young truck drivers are interactive learners, are free for users to download and allow workers to "see" the effects of their choices in the virtual world before making them in the real world.

The first tool the project produced was the Jump Force Simulation, which demonstrates the impact forces resulting from various cab or trailer exit techniques. It allows the user to choose the method of exit and then input their body weight. Then the tool calculates and graphically presents the actual forces exerted on the body by the different dismounting methods. It is this tool that allows a younger trucker to see that jumping down from the cab produces the same force on the body as being struck by an NFL linebacker.

A common barrier to using the three points of contact method has been uncovered by TIRES research: Workers tend to carry objects such as clipboards or even containers of coffee while entering and exiting the cab. To combat this, train drivers to put their gear in the map holder or on the floor of the cab by reaching from ground level, rather than carrying it during the climb.

The Prevent Slips Simulation is another tool in the effort to reduce slips and falls in the trucking industry. It shows the importance of wearing the appropriate footwear for different conditions. Users can choose different tasks, environments and footwear, and then watch to see how the "friction meter" responds and how long the worker can stay on his or her feet.

These simulations and other free training materials can be used, downloaded and/or copied from: [www.KeepTruckingSafe.org](http://www.KeepTruckingSafe.org).

Interest in these training materials now has spread far beyond our own borders, with trucking companies all over the world using our simulations for new-hire training and monthly training meetings. Our documents so far have been downloaded from Australia, Brazil, Canada, Egypt and Russia, for the simple reason that safety personnel everywhere need these materials but have very few other options available.

Together, we can prevent trucking injuries not only in Washington and the other 49 states, but worldwide.

*The Washington State Department of Labor & Industries, Olympia, Wash., is a state agency dedicated to the safety, health and security of the state's 3.2 million workers.*