

108TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 1248

To amend titles 23 and 49, United States Code, relating to motor vehicle weight and width limitations.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 12, 2003

Mr. PAUL introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

A BILL

To amend titles 23 and 49, United States Code, relating to motor vehicle weight and width limitations.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Safer Truck Act”.

5 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

6 The Congress finds the following:

7 (1) Heavy trucks carrying up to 20 metric tons
8 of cargo on the National Highway System are not
9 equipped with modern safety features presently
10 found on cars. These features include disc brakes,

1 crash absorbent bumpers and body panels, sway
2 bars, roll bars, and underride beams. Under current
3 law, truckers who choose to equip their vehicles with
4 such safety features risk fines and other penalties
5 for violating Federal weight and width restrictions
6 even when the amount of cargo carried is not more
7 than the amount customarily carried on trucks lack-
8 ing such safety features.

9 (2) Trucking is the deadliest industry in the
10 United States. One in every 7 Americans killed on
11 the job is a trucker (approximately 800 of the 5900
12 workplace deaths in 2001). 704 truckers were killed
13 in truck crashes alone in 2001, along with 4,378
14 motorists and pedestrians—more than 5,000 pre-
15 ventable deaths. Of the 130,000 people injured by
16 commercial trucks in 2001, 29,000 were truckers.
17 Over 150,000 people, including more than 25,000
18 truckers, have been killed in preventable large-truck
19 crashes since the end of the Vietnam War along with
20 more than 3,000,000 injured. Many of these deaths
21 can be prevented in the future by exempting safety
22 features from truck weight and width restrictions
23 and regulating only the weight of truck cargo rather
24 than the overall weight of the truck.

1 (3) New intermodal technologies have emerged
2 that promise to replace dangerous and inefficient
3 long-haul trucks with safer, more efficient short-haul
4 trucks that will utilize road, sea, rail, and inland wa-
5 terways transportation to substantially reduce the
6 Nation’s dependence on foreign oil and lower the
7 cost of food and other goods—especially for State
8 run welfare programs. Under current law, States are
9 required to impose unreasonable burdens on such
10 intermodal trucks, such as requiring special permits
11 and escort vehicles which are not required for larger,
12 more dangerous trucks, or risk the cut off of Fed-
13 eral highway funds. While some modification to
14 roads and bridges may be necessary to accommodate
15 safer short-haul intermodal trucks, the cost is insig-
16 nificant compared to the savings that will accrue
17 from reducing the excessive wear and tear on the
18 National Highway System caused by obsolete long-
19 haul trucks and their associated high rate of death
20 and injury.

21 **SEC. 3. VEHICLE WEIGHT LIMITATIONS.**

22 Section 127 of title 23, United States Code, is
23 amended by adding at the end the following:

24 “(h) EXCEPTION.—

1 “(1) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding subsection
2 (a), a State may allow a single unit truck or bus
3 without a trailer to carry up to 20 metric tons or
4 44,080 pounds of cargo, packaging, and load secure-
5 ment materials regardless of the overall weight of
6 the vehicle, its axle weights, or the weight of its
7 safety and energy conservation devices if the cargo
8 is evenly distributed in a compartment or combined
9 compartments at least 40 feet long, the overall
10 height of the vehicle and cargo does not exceed the
11 width of the wheelbase, the axles are positioned at
12 the extreme ends of the vehicle, the gross weight and
13 certified empty weight of the vehicle (including de-
14 tachable cargo compartments) are marked conspicu-
15 ously on the front of the vehicle in contrasting 3-
16 inch or taller letters and numbers.

17 “(2) CALCULATION OF GROSS WEIGHT.—For
18 purposes of this subsection, the gross weight shall be
19 calculated by adding 20 metric tons or 44,080
20 pounds to the empty weight.”.

21 **SEC. 4. VEHICLE WIDTH LIMITATIONS.**

22 Section 31113(b) of title 49, United States Code, is
23 amended to read as follows:

24 “(b) EXCLUSION OF SAFETY AND ENERGY CON-
25 SERVATION DEVICES.—

1 “(1) ENERGY CONSERVATION DEVICES.—Width
2 calculated under this section does not include an en-
3 ergy conservation device the Secretary decides is
4 necessary for safe and efficient operation of a com-
5 mercial motor vehicle.

6 “(2) SAFETY DEVICES.—

7 “(A) IN GENERAL.—A safety device that
8 reduces the possibility of death and injury shall
9 not be included in the calculation of width for
10 purposes of this section if such device fits en-
11 tirely within the legal travel lanes of all roads
12 upon which the vehicle operates.

13 “(B) SAFETY DEVICE DEFINED.—In this
14 subsection, the term ‘safety device’ includes
15 mirrors, grabhandles, steps, rearview video cam-
16 eras, crash absorbent bumpers and body panels,
17 batteries for regenerative braking, wheels, tires,
18 structural members, and drivetrain components
19 positioned to enhance vehicle stability.”.

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