

NY state seeks to crack down on wayward truckers

October 14 2009, By MICHAEL GORMLEY , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- New York state wants to crack down on truckers who rely on satellite devices to direct them onto faster but prohibited routes and end up crashing into overpasses that are too low for their rigs.

Gov. David Paterson on Wednesday proposed penalties including jail time and confiscation of trucks to come down on drivers who use GPS - global positioning systems - to take more hazardous routes and end up striking bridges.

"To our knowledge, no other state has similar legislation," said Clayton Boyce of the American Trucking Associations, an industry trade group based in Washington.

"Most trucking companies rely on GPS services that are specifically for trucks and route them away from restricted roads," he said. "Most of our members also use dispatching and fleet management systems that direct and track the vehicles by truck GPS services."

In New York, a truckers' group called the proposal unfair and unwarranted.

"We understand that bridge strikes have become an increasing problem for Westchester County and the New York metropolitan area," said Karin Kennett of the New York State Motor Truck Association. Requiring all trucks in the state that are using GPS to buy an enhanced device goes too far, she said.

"It places an unfair and unwarranted financial burden on every law-abiding trucking company doing business anywhere in New York at a time when our state claims to be trying to improve our business climate," Kennett said.

A safety group said trucks taking restricted routes is a scary fact of life on the nation's highways and parkways and something other states will need to consider as more drivers turn to GPS.

Gerald Donaldson, senior research director of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, said GPS adds to the list of electronics that also distract truckers, including radios, cell phones and a computer keyboard to communicate with companies and other drivers.

"GPS is the heart of it," Donaldson said. "Absolutely ... other states will be looking at Gov. Paterson's issue."

GPS can direct truckers, many of them carrying hazardous material, to restricted roads with overpass clearances too low for the rigs. Hauling on restricted or residential routes also pounds the life out of roads because the trucks are over weight limits and clog traffic.

"GPS for some truckers are crucial, and it also is part of a much larger array of electronic devices," he said. "You get paid by the mile, so it's your to your incentive to get as many miles and routes as you can in your tour of duty."

New York state alone has seen more than 1,400 bridge strikes in the past 15 years, including 46 so far this year in suburban Westchester County, testing many old bridges already in need of repair, said County Executive Andrew J. Spano. One bridge in his county was hit nine times this year.

"This sort of culture of just following the GPS and almost ignoring the road signs has created this public hazard," Paterson told reporters.

"Every week we hear of another truck striking a bridge on our parkways," said Spano, standing with Paterson at the bill's announcement.

"It's only a matter of time before someone is killed or a truck carrying chemicals or explosives hits a bridge," he said.

The bill would increase penalties for illegally using parkways and require all large commercial trucks to use [GPS](#) devices that route them away from restricted roads. It would also stick trucking companies or their insurance carriers with the bill for repairs and cleanup after bridge strikes.

The bill could hit the Legislature as early as January.

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