

Customer—not safety—still king in trucking industry

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A 'master slave' relationship between trucking companies and retail supply chains is foiling efforts to improve safety in an industry involved in nearly 200 fatal crashes last year.

The finding comes from an in-depth QUT study of more than 70 [truck drivers](#), employers, depot managers, receivers, schedulers, consignors and government transport groups.

Lead researcher Dr Angela Wallace, from the Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety - Qld (CARRS-Q) at QUT, said despite regulations and efforts to improve safety the truck driving industry continued to have one of the highest rates of [fatal injuries](#).

Government figures show there were 184 [fatal crashes](#) involving heavy trucks last year.

Dr Wallace said there continued to be strong pressure on truck drivers to deliver goods as quickly as possible, often at the expense of safety.

"One of the most significant findings from these interviews relates to the notion of power," she said.

"The perception that the 'customer is king' was widely viewed, with the majority of stakeholders believing that there exists a 'master slave mentality' in the industry.

"There is great frustration in the industry as to the apparent immunity of customers, particularly retail supply chains, to their responsibilities."

Dr Wallace said smaller trucking companies were perceived to be more vulnerable to the pressure of customer expectations.

The study found remuneration-related incentives, pressures and practices had historically put the balance of power upstream in the [supply chain](#) and truck drivers felt pressured to cut corners on safety.

Trucking industry [interviewees](#) called on transport departments to enforce breaches of chain of responsibility laws.

Dr Wallace said a new national Road Safety Remuneration Tribunal that began in July was hoped to reduce pressure on truck drivers to meet unrealistic deadlines.

"Knowingly or unknowingly, the activities of customers, consignors, agents, and suppliers have a major influence on drivers' fatigue levels, overloading, load restraint, and speeding, all of which affect safety," she

said.

The study, called Safety culture in supply chains: Customer is King, will be presented at the inaugural [International Conference on Occupational Safety in Transport](#), hosted by CARRS-Q from September 20 to 21 on the Gold Coast.

Keynote speakers are: Peter Garske, chief executive officer of Queensland Trucking Association, BHP Billiton's vice-president of safety and security David Jenkins, Professor Mike Regan, Centre for Transport and [Road Safety](#) Research at the University of New South Wales, and CARRS-Q Professor Narelle Haworth.

Professor Haworth said there were common challenges and issues across transportation industries.

"The percentage of vehicles used for work is very high. Tradesman and police drive for work, as well as ambulance, bus, train and CityCat drivers," she said.

"Work-related driving contributes to about one third of fatalities.

"This conference will provide the opportunity to learn from different sectors and improve health and [safety](#) in work-related transportation."

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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