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You can get the licence but you may not be capable of driving the truck

By Sharon Kennedy (Cross Media Reporter)

The WA trucking industry is pushing for driver training that will ensure that people know how to manage their vehicle in all circumstances

"The main issue is that we are putting people into trucks that have a licence but have not been trained to be truck drivers," says Jillian Dielesen.

The CEO of the Logistics Training Council, Ms Dielesen is also the chair of the newly formed Heavy Vehicle Safety and Training Alliance.

"It's that disconnect between what a licence means and what it means to be competent...in these very large, very expensive trucks that can do a great deal of damage."

Currently, an applicant need only show that they are physically able to drive that truck, states Ms Dielesen.

However, they do not need to show competence in hooking up, loading in a variety of different conditions, manoeuvring, rollover risks, or other necessary skills.

This compares with gaining a car licence where people spend 12 months training, she notes.

"We need to address that."

South West transport operator Mark Mazza agrees and maintains that the lack of training is not only a road safety issue but is costly the industry.

The thought that there are drivers on the road who have little knowledge about their job "horrifies" the industry says Ms Dielesen. More experience is essential.

Ms Dielsen raises the question "But where are they getting that experience?"

Fixing the problem

HVSTA has had many discussions with relevant departments and is now ready to tackle the issue, says Ms Dielesen.

The Alliance has agreed to a timetable for the first steps in what they hope will be a nationally adopted accreditation and training program, but there are also licencing requirements.

"It's no good having good driver training if we have a licensing regime that doesn't insist on formal driving as part of the process," said Ms Dielesen.

Rewrite the to focus more on the trucks
The current national Certificate II in Yard Operations certificate is focussed on warehouse operations. HVSTA wants to add mechanical knowledge and understanding: "an early taster of what a truck is".

This could be ready for schools in 2017, says Ms Dielesen.

A lot of trucking incidents are the result of misjudgement by other road users, says Ms Dielesen. Initial car driver training requires log books and practice in a variety of conditions.

The Alliance is talking with the Department of Transport about adding information into learner handbooks on sharing the road with truck drivers and caravans.

Truck drivers also need to show that they can handle great numbers of vehicles on the highways, particularly in the north west with increasing numbers of tourists and caravans.

HVSTA wants to attach units of competency to the licence and to require a log book for the first year after gaining a licence.

"There are a lot of people who perhaps get a heavy rigid truck licence on the way to getting their multi-combination licence.

"They hang on to their rigid licence for 12 months, don't drive a truck, then get the MC licence and they really have no experience driving any type of truck.

"We want some evidence of the experience of these people."

HVSTA is also investigating the idea of an industry training levy and will conduct a national audit of training programs already in place.
The trucking industry wants better driver training (SK - ABC Local (File photo))

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