Ia Ara Aotearoa Transporting NEW ZEALAND | Advisory

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To	All members and wider industry
From	Mark Stockdale, Policy and Advocacy Advisor

Coroners' recommendations on fatal crash involving steer tyre failure

Purpose

1 Providing a summary of a coroner's report into a fatal 2023 truck crash resulting from a steer tyre failure, and the coroner's recommendations to truck operators to specify tyres that have characteristics which match the type of work and road surfaces.

Executive summary – Coroner's recommendations

2 Following their investigation of the incident, detailed below, the coroner endorsed the following recommendations made by the Police Serious Crash Unit (SCU):

(a) that operators of heavy motor vehicles who have fleets that regularly enter quarries, landfills, and other off-road sites, carefully choose tyres that have characteristics which match, at least partly, with off-road usage. This is especially important for trucks fitted with super single tyres on a single steer axle.

(b) that increased training and awareness be provided to the drivers of heavy trucks around the dangers of front tyre blowouts on single steer axle trucks, especially those operating with super single tyres.

(c) that heavy vehicle tyre servicing companies strongly recommend and fit tyres that have characteristics which match with the usage of the truck. This is especially important for trucks fitted with super single tyres on a single steer axle.

Background

3 On 21 June 2023 a 69-year-old experienced truck driver suffered multiple fatal injuries when his 2020 Scania 3-axle tip truck experienced a steer tyre blow-out and crashed into an overhead bridge on SH1 in Drury, Auckland.

4 On the day of the accident, the driver completed a daily truck safety check before his shift, noting the tread, inflation and 'damage' to the tyres was acceptable. The truck was fitted with super-single front tyres, and a 4-axle tip trailer was attached. After driving to a quarry, the truck and trailer was loaded with sand.

5 While driving north on the Southern Motorway (SH1) in the second lane (closest to the central median and wire rope barrier), and travelling at around 85-88km/h, the truck crashed into the middle pillar supporting the Bremner Road overbridge.

6 The crash was witnessed by several members of the public and was caught on the dashcam footage of another truck. A driver on the opposite lane driving southbound noticed the truck was leaning heavily over on its right side, however its wheels were still on the ground. The witness noticed the driver of the truck was awake and alert. He was being thrown around a bit as the truck was half on the grass verge, however they could see the driver was trying his hardest to turn his steering wheel to the left. The witness saw the truck then hit the centre wire median barrier which stopped it from moving into the southbound motorway lanes. They noted that the front right wheel was turned hard left, however the witness commented that there was no way the driver was going to be able to pull the truck back onto the road.

7 Another witness, a truck driver travelling behind, described seeing the truck in front of create a lot of dust. The witness did not know where the dust came from but thought it might have been a blow out from a tyre. Two other witnesses who had worked in the tyre and trucking industry confirm hearing a “boom” that they recognised as the sound of a tyre blowing out.

8 The cab of the truck sustained significant damage when it hit the bridge, and the driver, who was wearing a seatbelt, was critically injured and died shortly after.

The Serious Crash Unit Investigation

9 An investigator from the Serious Crash Unit (SCU) provided a report to coroner. The report relied on EROAD data from the truck, CCTV footage and witness accounts as well as the scene examination. The SCU investigator concluded that about 150 metres prior to the Bremner Road overbridge, the front right tyre suffered a tyre failure and blew out.

10 An inspection of the truck after the crash did not identify any defects in the truck other than tyre failure. The truck was not overloaded, or overweight, and service records and daily vehicle inspections indicated that the truck and tyres were checked reasonably regularly.

11 The SCU noted that neither fatigue or distraction were factors, the driver was not impaired, and excessive speed was also not a factor in the crash.

12 The SCU investigator noted that in the event of a front tyre blowout in a truck, it is suggested that a driver should accelerate to counteract the side forces that are generated. Braking or taking the foot off the accelerator pedal is not advised as this increases the proportion of the side force relative to the forces keeping the vehicle travelling forward. While there is no evidence to indicate heavy braking occurred in this crash, EROAD data suggests the truck and trailer slowed immediately after the blowout. This suggests the driver may have taken his foot off the accelerator pedal.

13 The SCU investigator however noted the truck was fitted with 'super single' tyres on the steering axle. Both front tyres had been replaced in late 2022 due to tread damage or blowouts. They were replaced with a Giti branded GSR259 super single tyre. According to the Giti website the GSR259 is suited to “Long Distance, High Wearing Resistance and High Speed.” These tyres have relatively less resistance to cuts and chips. Out of the five categories of truck tyre stipulated by Giti, the GSR259 had the lowest tolerance for surface aggression and the lowest tolerance for application stress. They are the furthest away from

tyres with the characteristics of “Short distance, High Cut and Chip Resistance and Low Speed” on the Giti tyre charts.

14 The truck in question was not used for long haul routes on paved highways. It regularly visited landfills, quarries and construction areas as part of its normal day-to-day operations. It was therefore making many low-speed turns and manoeuvres on off-road surfaces which often have sharp edged aggregate.

15 The SCU reported that, anecdotally, the police are seeing a pattern of crashes where correct steering grade tyres with plenty of tread depth have been fitted but signs of off-road use damage to tyres are seen. This damage is often caused by driving on surfaces with sharp edged shale/shingle. The common denominator in those crashes has been identified as multiple daily trips into and out of quarries. The SCU investigator concluded that, considering the mixture of surfaces on which the truck was operating on, the “long haul” tyres fitted to the steering axle of the truck were not as fit for purpose.

16 The SCU investigator also noted the increasing popularity of “super single” steer axle tyres. These tyres have increased in popularity as they are able to take more weight, require less maintenance and can improve performance by reducing fuel consumption. However, they have the disadvantage of not having a built-in back up in the event of a flat tyre and increase the risk of drivers losing control of their truck. They observed that this crash is similar in this regard to other reported crashes.

17 Ultimately, the SCU investigators concluded that while it cannot be determined with certainty what caused the tyre failure, a likely contributing factor was the use of tyres that were not designed for prolonged and frequent low speed turns and manoeuvres on aggressive off-road surfaces. Although the tyre was legal, it is likely that the tyre suffered damage at some point while operating on these surfaces. This led to the tyre failing prior to the tread depleting to the point that the tyre needed to be replaced.

Recommendations

18 The coroner endorsed the following recommendations made by the SCU, which are directed at the trucking industry and tyre service industry at large:

(a) that operators of heavy motor vehicles who have fleets that regularly enter quarries, landfills, and other off-road sites, carefully choose tyres that have characteristics which match, at least partly, with off-road usage. This is especially important for trucks fitted with super single tyres on a single steer axle.
(b) that increased training and awareness be provided to the drivers of heavy trucks around the dangers of front tyre blowouts on single steer axle trucks, especially those operating with super single tyres.

(c) that heavy vehicle tyre servicing companies strongly recommend and fit tyres that have characteristics which match with the usage of the truck. This is especially important for trucks fitted with super single tyres on a single steer axle.

Transporting New Zealand advice

19 We recommend that fleet managers discuss with their tyre suppliers what type of tyres are appropriate for their vehicles based on the type of work they do and the surfaces they travel on. In this scenario for example, a mixed-service cut-resistance tyre would be suitable to minimise the risk of foreign object damage.

20 Members and non-members any with questions about this advisory and tyre selection can contact their local membership manager:

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Regards

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