

State FACE™ Fatality Narrative

Driver Killed and Co-Worker Injured When Truck Brakes Fail



INCIDENT FACTS

REPORT #: 71-273-2026s REPORT

REPORT DATE: January 23, 2026

INCIDENT DATE: September 10, 2024

WORKER: 44 years old

INDUSTRY: Plumbing, Heating, and Air-Conditioning Contractors

OCCUPATION: Truck Driver

SCENE: Public Roadway

EVENT TYPE: Motor vehicle, struck against



Image 1. Truck with crash damage.

SUMMARY

- A 44-year-old experienced truck driver was killed when his 3-axle tanker's brakes failed while going down a steep hill. He had worked for his employer, a residential and commercial plumbing contractor, for three years. His duties included driving a tanker truck, pumping septic systems, and transporting waste to dump stations.
- He was driving the tanker accompanied by a co-worker in the passenger's seat. They had pumped out a customer's septic system and were going to empty the truck's full tank at a dump station before heading to another job site. The loaded truck weighed over 50,000 lbs.
- They took an unfamiliar route to the station instead of the usual one the employer wanted them to take. They ended up on a steep quarter-mile hill with a T-shaped intersection at the bottom. The truck began moving dangerously fast down the hill.



SUMMARY

- The driver tried to slow down by applying the service brakes and parking brakes, but they did not work. He then tried downshifting the transmission from fifth to second gear, but the driveshaft to the rear axles snapped. The broken driveshaft meant he could also not use the supplementary engine brake or Jake Brake.
- Finally, he released the clutch which shut off the engine but could not stop the truck. He tried to turn right at the last moment as the truck sped through the intersection at the bottom of the hill. The truck's momentum made it tip over on its left side and crash through a concrete Jersey barrier. It came to rest in a gravel lot near a busy highway.
- He died at the scene, and his co-worker was hospitalized for a week with severe injuries.



CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Following the incident, investigators found:

- The state patrol's post-crash examination found that two rear axle drum brakes were not functioning prior to the incident. In addition, the employer's accident prevention program (APP) did not include requirements for routine vehicle maintenance services or inspections, which could have identified the faulty brakes. The truck also lacked periodic commercial motor vehicle inspections per 49 CFR 396.17.
- The truck was driven daily, but the brakes had not been serviced for at least 21 months before the incident.
- The driver did not always test the brakes before operating the truck due to the fast pace of his job. He also had an expired commercial driver's license (CDL).





Image 2. Hill where brakes failed with T-shaped intersection at bottom where truck crashed.





Image 3. Truck resting on side after crashing through Jersey barriers.

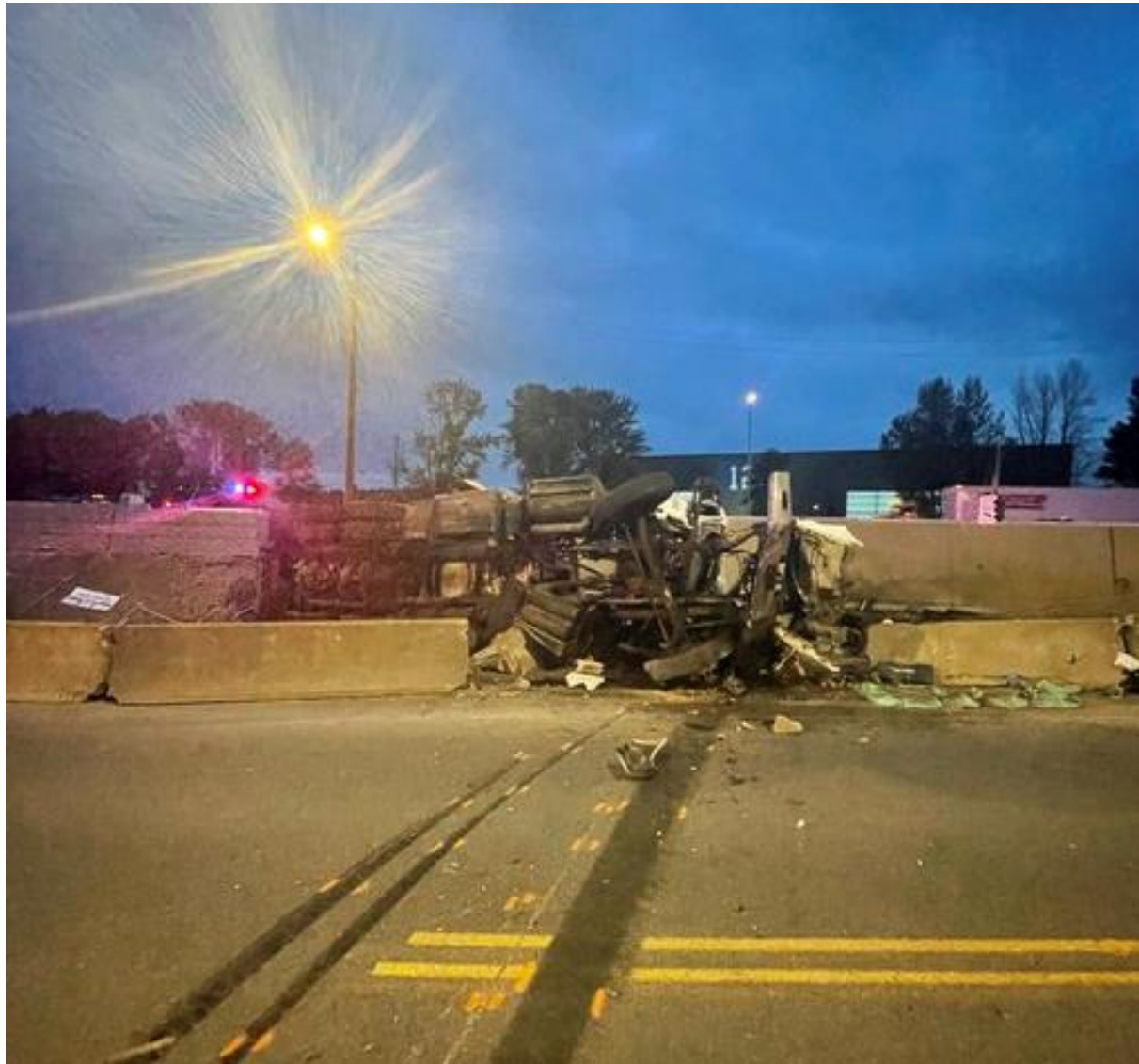


Image 4. Alternate view of overturned truck.



Image 5. Gravel area where truck came to rest.



Image 6. Tanker truck with collision damage.



Image 7. Front view of damaged truck.



Image 8. Upper brake shoes not in contact with drum while emergency brake is engaged.

REQUIREMENTS

Employers must:

- Make sure all motor vehicle parts are safe to use. See [WAC 296-865-20015\(2\)](#)
- Provide and use means to make your workplace safe. See [WAC 296-800-11010](#)
- Allow only drivers who have a current motor vehicle operator's license to operate motor vehicles on public roadways. See [WAC 296-865-20005\(2\)](#)
- Have every commercial motor vehicle periodically inspected according to Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations. See [49 CFR 396.17](#)



RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Require pre- and post-trip brake inspections.** Establish and enforce a policy in your written APP requiring drivers to perform federally-compliant vehicle inspections, including brake system checks, before, during, and after each shift. Require drivers to promptly report brake defects identified to dispatchers and in a Daily Vehicle Inspection Report (DVIR) at the end of their shift. Immediately remove trucks with brake defects from service until professional repairs are made in accordance with manufacturer's guidelines.
- **Develop and follow a preventive maintenance program.** Add a preventive maintenance program to your APP and schedule checks and services according to usage cycles such as mileage and hours.



FATALITY NARRATIVE

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Download the fatality narrative:

https://lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-research//files/2026/71_273_2026_TruckDriverBrakeFailure.pdf



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Plumbing, Heating, and Air-Conditioning Contractors

OCCUPATION:
Truck Driver

SCENE:
Public roadway

EVENT TYPE:
Motor vehicle, Struck against



Truck with crash damage.

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CONSTRUCTION / SERVICES / TRUCKING FATALITY NARRATIVE

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RESOURCES

[Motor Carrier Safety Planner.](#)

U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA).



DISCLAIMERS

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This narrative was developed by the Washington State Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (WA FACE) Program and the Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH), Washington State Dept. of Labor & Industries to alert employers and workers of a tragic incident in Washington State. It is based on preliminary data ONLY and does not represent final determinations regarding the nature of the incident or conclusions regarding the cause of the injury.



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