

News Release

Victims and Advocates Demand IG Investigation of Suppressed Traffic Safety Research

For Immediate Release

For More Information: Jerry Karth, (432) 556-1567

[Washington, D.C. — May 15, 2024] Victims and safety advocates called upon the Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Transportation to investigate credible allegations that senior officials suppressed research into safety measures on large commercial trucks to protect pedestrians and bicyclists. Their letter cited a sworn statement of a Department whistleblower and internal emails obtained under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

According to Quon Kwan, who managed the research project for the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration until his retirement in 2019, scientists and engineers at a federal laboratory found significant societal benefits when side guards are installed on large trucks to prevent gruesome traffic deaths known as “underrides.” But senior officials in the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration removed those findings from an official report published in 2020.

Hundreds of pedestrians and bicyclists die every year when they are swept under the unprotected sides of large trucks and are decapitated or crushed beneath truck axles. The suppressed research found that the benefits of preventing these deaths outweighed the costs. In fact, fuel savings from the guards’ aerodynamic design completely offset their installation and maintenance costs. Heavily redacted emails revealed that senior officials at the Department of Transportation met and edited the report to remove the safety findings.

A ProPublica/Frontline [exposé](#) that aired in June 2023 revealed that the trucking industry lobbied against the safety research.

Mr. Kwan, who had received the Department’s highest award for exemplary performance in 2017, leveled serious allegations of misconduct: “Suppressing this research was wrong. And more than public safety was harmed. U.S. taxpayers did not receive the work they paid for. This constitutes waste, fraud, and abuse and violates scientific integrity,” Kwan wrote in a sworn statement.

Safety advocates believe that removal of these pro-safety research findings in 2020 permitted federal regulators in 2023 to effectively halt a rulemaking on truck side impact guards that Congress encouraged in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021.

Jerry Karth, father of two daughters who were killed in an underride crash and co-founder of *AnnaLeah and Mary for Truck Safety*, said, “Removing the benefits of regulation from this research permitted NHTSA to stand with the trucking industry rather than the victims of these horrific deaths.”

Steve Bingham, *Families for Safe Streets*, said, “My daughter, like so many others, was crushed under the wheels of a truck with no side guards while she rode her bicycle. But NHTSA didn’t even bother to consider preventing cyclist deaths caused by trucks. That’s an indefensible oversight in NHTSA’s work and an outrage to the families of the victims.”

Eric Hein, *Institute for Safer Trucking*, said, “NHTSA chose to underestimate the number of preventable underride deaths and overestimate the potential costs of a side underride guard regulation. Garbage in. Garbage out. As a result, they released a proposed rulemaking that vastly underestimated the benefits of preventing those kinds of violent deaths and injuries.”

The following individuals and organizations signed the letter to the Inspector General: Joan Claybrook, former NHTSA Administrator; Jerry and Marianne Karth, AnnaLeah & Mary for Truck Safety; Caron Whitaker, League of American Bicyclists; Robert Weissman, Public Citizen; Jen Walsh, Institute for Safer Trucking; Zach Cahalan, Truck Safety Coalition; Tami Friedrich Trakh, Citizens for Reliable & Safe Highways; Daphne & Steve Izer and Russell Swift, Parents Against Tired Truckers; Amy Cohen, Families for Safe Streets; Stephen Bingham, Ride of Silence; Mike McGinn, America Walks; Elisa Braver, University of Maryland School of Medicine; Perry Ponder, Seven Hills Engineering; Bruce Enz, Injury & Crash Analysis; Francoise Blusseau, In Memory of Sylvia Bingham; Lois Durso Hawkins & Mark Hawkins, STOP Underrides - In Loving Memory of Roya; Eric Hein, father of Riley Hein; Wendy Sievertson, mother of Riley Hein; Jay Hightman, In Memory of Robyn Hightman; Keith Wolf, In Memory of Alexander Wolf; Cindy & Todd Zimmerman, In Memory of Kaylyn Hunter Gatlin; and Laurie & Randy Higginbotham, In Memory of Michael Higginbotham.

Links to Relevant Documents:

[Advocates’ Letter to the IG](#)

[Statement of Mr. Kwan](#)

[Suppressed Report](#)

[Internal Emails](#)

[Published Report](#)

