

Driver Retention & Safety:

New Research Confirms Strong Relationship, With a Twist

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In August 2020, a transportation safety research organization called the National Surface Transportation Safety Center for Excellence (housed at the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute in Blacksburg, VA), published a new research report titled, “[Examining the Relationship Between CMV Driver Retention and Safety.](#)” Before you stop here and say to yourself, ‘well everyone knows that better driver retention results in better safety’, please read on because this research is a bit different.

Indeed, previous research has found that high driver turnover is associated with higher crash rates. However, until this new study, it was unclear if drivers who *voluntarily* change jobs (i.e., *voluntary turnover*) have higher crash rates compared to drivers who stayed in the job or are terminated due to recent crash involvement or safety violations (i.e., *involuntary turnover*). This study investigated the gap in knowledge between *voluntary* and *involuntary* driver turnover, and how this difference might impact future driver safety performance. More specifically, this study examined the relationship between continuous employment, voluntary turnover and involuntary turnover, and involvement in future FMCSA-reportable crashes and moving violations.

After evaluating a final data set on more than 12,000 drivers that were initially hired by a single large truckload motor carrier, and were studied over a 3-year period, this study’s report (dated August 13, 2020) found that:

- crash & violation risk was lowest for drivers that stayed with the carrier over the full 3-year period,
- it rose for drivers that voluntarily separated from the carrier (without a recent crash or violation),
- and was the highest for drivers that left the carrier following a crash or violation in the previous 7 days.

These results support much of the previous research showing a relationship between high turnover rates and higher crash rates. In turn, they provide additional evidence of the reverse—carriers that maintain high levels of driver retention experience lower crash rates (and, we at STC add, presumably lower CSA scores in the Unsafe Driving and Crash Indicator BASICs).

A final note about this study—the researchers who conducted the analyses also performed a comprehensive literature search on CMV driver retention and safety. Their final report includes a useful and enlightening 4-page chapter outlining the findings of driver retention and safety research conducted over the last 30 years.

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