

## House committee to consider sleep apnea bill

Written by Australian Business

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October 10, 2013 /**24-7PressRelease**/ -- Earlier this summer, Representatives Larry Buschon of Maryland and Dan Lipinski of Illinois introduced a bill that would require the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to pass a formal rule regarding the testing of commercial truck drivers for sleep apnea. The bill was introduced at a time when the FMCSA was considering releasing an informal guidance document on the issue, which many regard as essential to preventing [truck accidents](#) and promoting highway safety. Recently, the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee in the House announced that it would consider the bill.

As is usually the case, the reason for the introduction of this bill is money. The FMCSA could, in fact, issue informal guidance on the issue of sleep apnea. This unofficial guidance would, in effect, require commercial trucking companies to screen their drivers for the condition and to take other steps to address the problem of driver fatigue. The problem, critics say, is that any program involving sleep apnea screening would likely cost the industry upwards of \$1 billion each year.

If the FMCSA is required to issue a formal rule on the subject of sleep apnea, it must first undertake an evaluation of the rule's benefits in light of its costs. The agency would also be required to submit the rule to comment by both the trucking industry and the public at large. Supporters of the bill argue that the process for drafting new trucking regulations should be more transparent, which would allow for greater administrative accountability. Notably, the bill introduced by Buschon and Lipinski would not require the FMCSA to pass a regulation regarding sleep apnea testing.

The introduction of this bill comes at a time when the trucking industry is angry over the imposition of new hours of service regulations by the FMCSA. These rules, which require drivers to take breaks in order to decrease the risk of fatigue, have been seen by many in the industry as unnecessary and costly. Sleep apnea is simply the next subject of disagreement between industry leaders and the FMCSA.

Although it may be difficult and expensive for the trucking industry to introduce initiatives designed to address sleep apnea, the reality is that truck driver fatigue is a serious problem in the U.S. and one of the primary causes of truck accidents. The expense of testing drivers may seem large, but efforts to address the problem may, in fact, save hundreds of lives each year.

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