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A movement to protect pedestrians from city trucks

Municipalities are exploring how truck side guards might help prevent serious on-the-road accidents.

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Edited by Adam Redling

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Hauling Safety

A rise in cyclist and pedestrian deaths in traffic collisions is spurring a push for safer streets.

Now, a growing coalition of organizations are calling for the implementation of safety measures, including side guards on large commercial trucks such as waste haulers, dump trucks and box trucks. These guards are meant to guard against pedestrians being pulled under the vehicle's wheels in the event of a collision.

In Philadelphia, the recent deaths of Tomas Montanez, a bicyclist who was run over by a right-turning dump truck, and Emily Fredricks, who was hit by a garbage truck making a right turn while cycling to work, has pushed the issue of road safety to the forefront.

"In the case of Tomas and Emily, I think truck side guards, along with other safety measures, would have prevented their deaths," Sarah Clark Stuart, executive director of the [Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia](#), an organization that promotes safe cycling in the region, says. "Do not use the word 'accident' when talking about these kinds of fatalities because they are not inevitable."

Pedestrians now account for 15 percent of all traffic deaths nationwide,

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according to a recent [Governors Highway Safety Association](#) report. However, in a 2016 tally in Philadelphia, the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia found that pedestrians and bicyclists made up more than half of the city's road deaths.

After Fredricks' death, the Bicycle Coalition urged the city to adopt a number of safety measures, including a deadline for all trucks doing business in the city to install side guards.

"We're looking at a whole range of solutions," Stuart says. "At the top of our list are truck side guards, along with protected bike lanes, speed enforcement and other community-level traffic calming approaches."

According to Stuart, to promote safer streets, the Bicycle Coalition is also working with various groups to rally around Vision Zero principles.

Vision Zero is a strategy to eliminate traffic fatalities and severe injuries, while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all. First implemented in Sweden in the 1990s, Vision Zero has proved successful across Europe, and now is gaining momentum in major American cities such as New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Seattle and Boston.

"Companies and local governments that operate in major urban areas should take a careful look at side guards as a way to prevent tragic incidents involving pedestrians and bicyclists," David Biderman, executive director and CEO of [Solid Waste Association of North America \(SWANA\)](#), Silver Spring, Maryland, says.

According to Biderman, there is an increasing number of cities in the United States that have bike share programs, so there are many more cyclists on the road than there were five or 10 years ago.

"We need to be evaluating ways to protect the cyclists who may inadvertently run into the side of a truck from being swept underneath the truck," he says. "Side guards are a leading way to prevent that."

Biderman points out that side guards can also mitigate the danger of a collision with pedestrians who are distracted on the road, including those who may be texting while walking or listening to music with earbuds.

"For a turning truck, an inattentive pedestrian would walk into a side guard and bounce off the truck instead of potentially being run over by it," says Biderman.

According to Biderman, there are 100,000-plus garbage trucks in the U.S., and more work needs to be done to ensure they are safe on the road.

"You need to employ best practice techniques to prevent the worst from happening," he says. "So, we are encouraging waste haulers to be proactive, and not wait for an incident to occur before considering side guards."

One challenge of getting side guards implemented in a majority of waste hauling trucks nationally is the large amount of individual variation among the vehicles.

"To implement side guards on a wider basis, it is important to customize them to any make or model of garbage truck because the vehicles come in a variety of configurations," Biderman says. "There are different kinds of trucks, and the bodies are different lengths. You need to be able to customize the side guards to fit the space between the wheels to prevent someone from falling into the space and being run over."

One of the nation's highest profile uses of truck side guards occurs in New York City, which is requiring the safety barrier on 10,000 vehicles by 2024 as part of its Vision Zero Action Plan for ending traffic deaths and injuries.

To comply with New York City's Vision Zero program, [Action Carting Environmental Services](#), Teaneck, New Jersey, a provider of non-hazardous waste management services for New York City and New Jersey, chose to retrofit its fleet of trucks with side guards from [Dur-A-Guard](#), Union, New Jersey.

[Dur-A-Guard](#) worked with Action Carting to accommodate the various makes, models and configurations of its fleet.

To encourage such implementation, Biderman recommends the use of side guards that ease truck operation and maintenance. Companies like [Dur-A-Guard](#) offer side guards that lift up or swing down on hinges to offer access beneath the truck. Another high-density, aluminum design is lightweight enough to be removed by one person.

Along with the momentum to reduce traffic-related deaths and injuries at the regional level, national legislation is also gaining steam that would help prevent fatal road accidents.

In fact, one proposed federal law seeks to save lives with truck side guards. U.S. Senators Marco Rubio (R-Florida) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-New York) recently introduced the Stop Underrides Act (S. 2219), which aims to prevent a deadly type of crash between trucks and cars. These traumatic accidents occur when a car slides under a large truck's body or trailer. Underride crashes are often fatal, even at low speed.

The Stop Underrides Act proposes adding a simple barrier under trucks, called an "underride guard," to prevent a car from sliding underneath a truck in an accident.

"There has been a real shift in thinking at the municipal level toward reducing the severity of collisions, and now it is time for the states and the feds to catch up," Stuart says.

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