
7 Ways to Avoid Low-Clearance Accidents

Run an Internet search on “low-clearance accidents” and you’ll see countless examples of trucks colliding with bridges. They may be spectacular to watch, but they carry a high cost. Damage often exceeds six figures. And between 2014-18, 12 bridge strikes involving large trucks were deadly, according to the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration.

While avoiding low-clearance accidents may seem simple, it can get tricky. Some GPS systems don’t effectively tell truckers about low overpasses. And unexpected detours may take drivers onto unfamiliar routes with unexpected dangers.

Drivers should use these seven tips to avoid bridge strikes and other low-clearance accidents:

1. Use a commercial GPS. No GPS is foolproof, and drivers sometimes wander into danger unexpectedly because their GPS doesn’t anticipate low underpasses. Using a GPS that’s configured for large commercial motor vehicles (trucks measuring 12 foot, 6 inches high) will help. Do not use GPS units designed for cars.
2. Plan your route. Whether or not you use a GPS, you should always seek approved truck routes. If you’re unfamiliar with the road ahead, seek advice from your supervisor or other drivers who know the route. Ask about clearances specifically.
3. Know the danger zones. Low-clearance accidents happen more often in certain areas of the country. For example, New York State is known for bridge strikes on its parkways, which include many lower bridges built hundreds of years ago. Some bridges in North Carolina are also notorious for accidents.
4. Know your truck’s height. Measure the height of both your truck and your load before starting each trip.
5. Watch for signs. Low clearances are marked by signs listing the height of the overpass or other obstruction. Look for them so you know of potential trouble ahead. But don’t assume the height on the sign is accurate; the overpass may be lower than indicated.
6. Watch the road surface. Ice and snow— common this time of year—can add inches to the pavement, and those inches could be the difference between a pass-through and a collision with an overpass. Road resurfacing also raises the pavement. And while the roads get updated, the low-clearance signs don’t.
7. Use extra caution. If you’re not sure your truck will clear an overpass, stop in a safe place and check before proceeding. It’s always wiser to stop than to take a chance on a bridge strike.

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Safety Brief

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