

JACKKNIFING



This term is used when a tractor trailer skids on the road due to slippery road conditions, causing the trailer to swing out to one side forming an angle. If a truck jackknifes there is a high possibility of a rollover accident as well. It will depend on the speed the driver was traveling at the time.

Even though this type of accident is often caused by slippery roads especially during the winter, some jackknifes are the result of poor braking decision by the driver:

- A driver can lock the steering axle brakes causing the rig to move straight ahead regardless of wheel angle.
- The driver can lock the drive axles which commonly results in jackknife accidents.
- The driver can lock the trailer axles, causing the driver to lose directional control.

If you are a professional truck driver, your actions taken at the moment of a possible jackknife will determine whether the outcome will be positive or negative. Locking the steering axles clearly is the action you should take and produces the most desirable outcome, avoiding the accident. Although the driver will not be able to steer the tractor, the truck and trailer will travel a straight, predictable path.

Keep in mind that most jackknife accidents can typically be avoided by prudent braking. You can avoid jackknifing by:

- Keeping a safe distance from other vehicles on the road (especially in wet or slippery conditions). It is recommendable to keep about 8 seconds.
- Reducing your speed before any curves or turns, not during one. The driver should brake in a straight line prior to the turn. Speed can be increased after the turn is completed.
- Start braking with plenty of time and over the longest distance possible so you control the braking power applied.
- Not braking and changing direction during evasive actions. If possible, you should brake first, release the brakes, veer, and then reapply the brakes.
- When the tractor is skidding, the truck driver should release the brakes and steer into the skid before the skid causes the truck to jackknife.

