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THE SOLUTIONS AUTONOMOUS VEHICLES HOPE TO OFFER THE TRUCKING INDUSTRY

Written By: Rachel E. Phillips and Nathan R. Skeen

Many people are aware of emerging technology in self-driving personal vehicles (as made popular by companies like Tesla and Google). However, just as important are the advancements made in self-driving commercial vehicles and in the trucking industry. Billions of dollars are being invested every year in the race to reach a complete level of autonomous driving.

Investors are betting that autonomous trucks will greatly improve safety and efficiency in the trucking industry. It is no secret that truck drivers face one of the most dangerous jobs in the nation. In the last few years, injuries and fatalities from trucking accidents have been increasing to all-time highs. Studies have found that approximately 90% of trucking accidents stem from human error. Additionally, many companies are suffering from driver shortages. In fact, reports indicate that there is a national shortage of up to 60,000 drivers. Autonomous trucks may be the answer for many of the problems the trucking industry is facing.

Ideally, autonomous trucks will not get distracted, can operate longer without rest or breaks, and will have a much better reaction time than a human driver. Current technology already allows autonomous trucks to detect objects and vehicles almost one mile away, and this will likely only increase with ongoing advancements. Most autonomous trucks have full 360-degree awareness and can collect and analyze amazing amounts of data. This data can be shared and adapted by entire fleets of vehicles in a matter of minutes, improving efficiency and safety.

Autonomous trucks are already making deliveries and test runs throughout the United States. In fact, one company recently reported that its autonomous truck completed an 800-mile drive without driver intervention. Another company is operating seven routes autonomously from Phoenix to Dallas. Yet another company offers add-ons to any truck for \$5,000 to allow for adaptive cruise control, emergency braking, and automatic lane centering.

With these new technologies comes new challenges. The trucking industry will need to adapt its strategy for employment, accident investigation, and liability defense. Attorneys who are prepared for changes in the industry will be able to assist business as it embraces the future.

Rachel E. Phillips and Nathan R. Skeen are attorneys at Snow Christensen & Martineau – Utah’s bedrock business, litigation and trial firm since 1886 – and are active members of the Utah Trucking Association, and trusted advocates defending and supporting trucking companies in litigation and transactional matters. For more information, visit www.scmlaw.com.



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