

## Quick time bulletin 3 – Abnormal loads

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## Collision with an abnormal load

*Fatal collision with a vehicle transporting a large dockside crane, raising issues about:*

- *Enforcement of the legal requirements for marking and lighting abnormal loads*
- *Training in abnormal load movement*
- *Force policy on the authorisation and movement of abnormal loads.*
- *ACPO guidelines on the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1988 and the Road Vehicles (Authorisation of Special Types) (General) Order 2003*

### Overview of incident

In January 2008 a haulier wanting to transport a large dockside crane across the country notified the abnormal load office of the local Force. The office checked the route and dimensions of the load against Highways Agency Guidance and decided a police escort was needed for the first part of the journey, because of a complicated manoeuvre involved in the early stages, but that a private escort would then take over.

The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1988 as amended (C & U Regulations) and The Road Vehicles (Authorisation of Special Types) (General) Order 2003 (STGO) require loads of certain dimensions, classed as abnormal loads, to be correctly marked and illuminated; it is illegal for them to be on the road if they are not. The Force policy on the authorisation and movement of abnormal loads was sparsely worded, however, and did not include any reference to the legislation and guidelines that govern the movement of such loads. Nor did it make reference to the geographical nature of the county in terms of its road network or include any guidelines on night time movements within the county. Moreover, the policy did not allocate ownership of the roles and responsibilities involved in authorising and escorting abnormal loads.

As was its normal practice, the abnormal loads office relied heavily upon the information provided to them by the haulier about the dimensions of the load, the route it intended to take and appropriate signing and lighting. During the process of authorising abnormal loads and the subsequent movement, no discussion took place on how, if at all, the load should be marked in relation to the legislation.

Before dawn a few days later a Heavy Goods Vehicle set off with the load. The traffic officers escorting it had taken steps to check that the load was well lit before departure but had not checked that its dimensions were in accordance with the paperwork. They were also unaware of the legal requirement to place reflective markers on the extremities of the load. The Force traffic department was aware of its powers to prevent a load from travelling but had no knowledge of what made an abnormal load illegal. Indeed, no one person or department within the Force had ownership of this particular aspect of abnormal load movement.

Part way into the journey, the escorting duties were taken over by a private escort as previously arranged. Some time later, while the load was travelling along a main road, a man on his way to

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work drove past the escorting vehicle in the opposite direction and collided with the offside of the crane. He died of his injuries.

When police officers arrived at the scene they found that the required reflective markers were in the cab of the lorry and not on the extremities of the load as required by the law.

## Type of investigation

IPCC Independent Investigation

## Recommendations

### National recommendation

1. It is the case nationally as well as locally that no one person or department has ownership of ascertaining whether an abnormal load is illegal. The IPCC initially recommended that ACPO should issue guidance that all authorisation forms that are sent to and from the haulage company and the force abnormal loads clerk (with requests that fall within the STGO and C and U regulations) should include instructions for the haulier on the signage and lighting required for that type of load. This should be added to the dimensions entry.

The IPCC withdrew this recommendation as ACPO wished to consider alternative mechanisms for tackling the issue of signage and lighting at a national level. ACPO is currently developing a national policy on this issue.

### Local recommendations

1. In this case, the officers escorting the load had been provided with the necessary paperwork on the abnormal load movement, including information on the dimensions and intended route for the load. However, it was not common for this information to be passed on from the abnormal loads office to officers escorting the load, which made it harder for them to conduct an adequate risk assessment based on legislation. As they did not have all available and correct information, this meant they had to rely on the haulage company providing the correct information.

Police officers allocated to escort an abnormal load, especially those that fall within the STGO and C and U Regulations, should hold all available paperwork prior to the move so that an adequate risk assessment can be undertaken as well as a roadworthiness test. The Force's policy should reflect this.

2. There was a clear lack of training in the area of abnormal load movements within the Force's road traffic police. Many traffic officers conducted escorts without having knowledge of the regulations that govern the movement of the load itself, thereby escorting loads that are actually illegal under the governing regulations. Although abnormal loads and their regulation and movement were included in the manual that was handed out to traffic officers once they had completed their traffic patrol course, officers did not see the point of this as it had not been specifically taught to them during the three week traffic patrol officer course. It is understood that traffic officers gain knowledge and expertise through work experience; however the problem was ignorance of the legislation on how to escort an abnormal load adequately and safely and consequently not knowing whether the load is legal or not.

The traffic patrol officer course should be adapted to include the movement of abnormal loads and the legislation governing its movement. All new and existing traffic patrol officers within the Force should receive this training.

3. The Force was failing in its duty by attaching traffic patrol officers to the department and expecting them to carry out their role without attending the traffic patrol officer course at an early stage. Some officers had been in the department between six and 18 months without having had the necessary training. They were paired with a mentor on joining but this did not detract from the need and importance of having sufficient training to carry out their role efficiently and safely.

All officers joining the traffic department should attend an accredited traffic patrol course within three months of joining. If there is no course available within this time, consideration should be given to sending officers to another force to undergo the training.

4. The Force policy on the authorisation and movement of abnormal loads should be reviewed and include:
  - clear allocation of roles and responsibilities in the authorisation and movement of abnormal loads
  - guidance on risk assessments when assessing the dimensions and intended route of the abnormal load in terms of the time of day it is travelling and whether it is to have a police escort or not.
5. There were instances of unescorted night time movements of abnormal loads throughout the county. A police escort was only attached if a traffic contravention was necessary; otherwise a private escort supplied by the haulier or no escort at all was the norm.

With night time movements of abnormal loads that fall within the C & U and STGO, whether the movement on the intended route has to contravene traffic regulations or not, a police escort should be attached to the load until it is either out of the county or travelling on a dual carriageway/motorway suitable for its size.

With day time movements of abnormal loads that fall within the STGO and C & U, whether the movement on the intended route has to contravene traffic regulations or not, an adequate risk assessment needs to be carried out jointly by the abnormal loads and the traffic department. This assessment should include the visibility of the load, traffic congestion, dimensions and its intended route.

## **Force response**

### Local recommendation 1:

The Force requires the haulier to ensure the driver keeps a copy of the police authorisation with him/her so that officers can check this against the actual dimension/weights if they feel the need. This has also now been incorporated into the Force policy.

### Local recommendation 2:

There is no national traffic officers course and, as such, it will not present a significant difficulty to introduce the relevant legislation into future locally delivered courses.

### Local recommendation 3:

The Force endeavors to provide officers with a traffic patrol officers course within 12 months. It

is difficult for a force the size of the Force to run its own course, given the very low turnover of staff.

However, recently the Force has outsourced a traffic patrol officers course run by a reputable provider (Aits) who are ex-police traffic trainers. Through this the Force is endeavoring to tailor training to suit Force needs. One of the criticisms received in feedback from officers who attend other forces' courses is that they are designed for that force and the content is beyond the Force's control. Therefore, a large part of the course may deal with offences etc, which are not relevant to the Force's traffic officers.

The criticism of the length of time some officers wait for their traffic patrol officers course is a little harsh, with the most extreme example at 20 months being due to personal reasons; otherwise no officer has waited beyond eight months. In respect of the abnormal load area, this has now been overcome with the training delivered to all current officers ensuring that within any escort there will always be a trained practitioner.

#### Local recommendation 4:

The Force's escorting abnormal loads policy went live on 1 September 2008 and the issues identified have been taken into account. Hours of darkness movements are now prohibited in normal circumstances unless a police escort is provided, for which the haulier must make payment. Any deviation from this policy must be authorised at senior level within the operations division.

#### Local recommendation 5:

The abnormal loads office has a list of suitable roads which guides the risk assessment process. Working within the same office is the traffic management sergeant who is an experienced traffic officer with good operational knowledge of the relevant routes. This post-holder will provide the first port of call in the joint risk assessment or, in his or her absence; this will be provided by one of the operational duty traffic sergeants. Additionally, the policy provides guidance on the restriction of movements in periods of anticipated congestion such as bank holiday weekends, peak holiday periods and 'rush hours'.

***If you need more information about this case, please email [learning@ipcc.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:learning@ipcc.gsi.gov.uk)***