

## Let's Talk Fleet Risk - Episode 14

### Tyre Safety - 35,000 tyre incidents a year, the tip of the iceberg

#### Stuart Lovatt – Chairman, Tyresafe

**Simon:** October is National Tyre Safety Month, organised by the charity TyreSafe. I'm joined for this episode by Stuart Lovatt – the new Chairman of TyreSafe – to talk about why fleet operators should get involved with this year's campaign.

Hi Stuart and welcome to the podcast.

Congratulations on your new appointment. We've known each other many years from your previous role as Strategic Road Safety Lead at National Highways – could you start with a brief introduction to TyreSafe for listeners who maybe aren't familiar with it?

**Stuart:** Yes of course – my own experience in working with TyreSafe went back to 2006 at the Prince Michael of Kent Road safety Awards, at that time I started to understand what TyreSafe was, prior to them becoming a registered road safety charity. I started to understand more and more about the importance of tyres and what that means for trying to reduce the number of incidents on the network. My role within in National Highways – we could be looking at something like 35,000 tyre related incidents on the strategic road network, and that network is only 3.5% of roads within the country, so you can extrapolate that and think of how many incidents must be happening each year. To me the importance of safer tyres became an increasing concern that more needed to be done in this field, so I'm pleased to say that something like 16 years I've been working on tyre safety and so upon my retirement from National Highways it was very kind of TyreSafe to offer me the Chair of the organisation to carry on the work I was hoping to do when I was in National Highways.

**Simon:** 35,000 tyre incidents a year is a staggering amount – and that leads onto my first question - DfBB often puts out information talking about the need for regular vehicle checks because the DVSA statistics show really big failure rates for MOTs on both cars and vans. The number that fail an MOT at the first attempt is a staggering amount. How big a problem is tyre safety for company vehicles?

**Stuart:** I think it would be fair to say that safety of tyres and the importance within keeping your vehicle on the road is probably not very well understood and that's not just people who are driving on business – it's generally that people don't understand the importance. We talk about business tyre safety – these 4 things that are actually touching the road (or two things if you're on a 2 wheeler) and it's that piece of machinery, a very complex piece of machinery, it's that which can actually help you to stop if something unexpected happens on the journey. It's not just drivers on business – it's a general campaign that I think what business can do and from our previous work with Driving for Better Business, it's important we continue to raise awareness as you said - your daily checks before you set off, a more detailed weekly and monthly check - it's continuously reminding the drivers, the fleet managers, the depot managers about the importance of doing these checks and that's why in Tyresafe we have the acronym to ACT upon your tyres – air, condition and tread - because any one of those can lead to a failure which can have not only consequences around the actual journey but potentially much more serious consequences.

**Simon:** Yes, air, condition and tread is a very good acronym and it forms the basis for a lot of your campaigns, but one of the good things I think about Tyresafe, is the messages are all backed up by hard evidence and research you've done. I wanted to talk about that. One of the recent research projects was National Highways together with Bridgestone and TyreSafe on the causes of HGV tyre failures on the SRN. What did you find?

**Stuart:** That research that we did was a very good piece – we collected the debris on the road and very often when you are coming to do research you think you know what you're going to find, but of course, it's always enlightening when you're proven wrong. We thought that retread tyres in company vehicles would be a cause of tyre failures leading to debris. Unfortunately, we've had fatalities of people who have hit tyre debris so it's a growing concern within NH but also again generally across the industry. It's not just the tyre bursting – I've seen CCTV footage where a vehicle's tyres have burst and gone through the central reservation and hit oncoming traffic. What we found actually was it wasn't the retreads, it was actually a significant under-inflation of tyres, leading to a build up of heat in the tyre which then caused the tyre to fail. For those who are more familiar with this the Psi on a heavier tyre is like a mini bomb going off – when it does finally give. It can ultimately lead to loss of control of the vehicle. You see these vehicles hitting central reservations because you do lose control so that was a very interesting piece of research which has helped to change our thinking and for us to re-push those messages about the need to constantly check your tyre pressures. We have other research on the tread depth, but this particular one is helping us to get that message across. People need to check their tyre pressures more regularly than they are.

**Simon:** I've seen CCTV of some of those HGV tyres blowing out and it's really quite spectacular and you realise you don't want to be in the vicinity when that happens, so any fleet operator would be wise to have look at some of those videos if you don't have an appropriate pressure checking regime as part of your vehicle checks.

**Stuart:** There is actually new technology now that you can use to help you monitor that for heavy vehicles.

**Simon:** Presumably they have pressure monitors as well so how does the new technology work?

**Stuart:** You can attach them to the tyres and it helps you to alert you when the tyre pressure starts to drop, so it is certainly something that fleet managers can check on more regularly – tyre pressure is not something you are going to pick up as a driver when you do your daily walk around – this is something that can be done weekly or monthly which will start to see those pressures starting to drop. As your tyre pressures start to drop actually you could only have 50% of the tyre touching the road surface so that's what causing the heat that is dangerous. Going back to CCTV, I once saw a clip of a National Highways traffic officer who had to put a rolling roadblock on to remove tyre debris. This thing was probably several feet long – it was the length of a traffic officer and these can weigh up to 80Kg so we had to stop the entire motorway network while it was removed, so even if there's no catastrophic failure, the debris alone means we have to shut the network while it's removed and so therefore its leading to more business delays and disruption and these are the kind of things irrespective of potential consequences for injury or the loss of that vehicle and the insurance costs and downtime that comes from that. All that leads to affecting the business bottom line so all this can be linked in to generally trying to support business which is why we are so delighted to be working with DfBB on the whole issue of work-related road risk and fleet management.

**Simon:** So, this research was around HGV tyres – you mentioned some other research around tread depths. As I understand it that bought in cars and vans as well?

**Stuart:** Yes, back in 2016 with TyreSafe we did a project on tread depth – it was 6 years ago now. The campaign talked about 1 in 4 vehicles potentially had an illegal tyre in terms of tread depth. 70% had below 2mm – the thickness of a credit card - so we tried to remind people within your fleets you should be starting to check the tyre more regularly and replacing it when it goes below 3mm. Once you get to 2mm it's the thickness of a credit card before it becomes illegal. If you're doing a lot of miles that tread will very quickly burn off. Prior to previous economic downturns, a lot of business and public sector organisations had a policy of changing the tyres at 3mm – and that started to drop and people ran them for a bit longer. The issue we found at that time was we needed to remind businesses and the general public on the need to be checking much more regularly. As we hit harsher financial times and we talk about recession and cost of living, it's a good time to remind businesses it's a false economy not to replace them. National Highways has partnered with TyreSafe this year to look at where people have made that decision, and there's over 133 retailers who are supporting this research by checking tyres, and this research will go on to about March 2023.

We have already checked about 150,000 tyres and that data will be analysed and checked to see if there's been a difference – improvement or getting worse. We have that research as an independent evaluation by Imperial College London who can give that research some academic rigour and independence so they will help to produce the information and we can then work with people like Driving for Better Business and other strategic partners to raise awareness of the findings. Previous research helped us to get some key messages out and I think this will be the same – potentially we might find some information that surprises us as well.

**Simon:** I've been involved with random car park checks of business drivers and fleet vehicles over the years and there can be a tendency to think that a tyre takes a while to wear down to that level, but actually if you have drivers doing high mileage it's amazing how quickly that last bit of tread can wear down. I've seen what have been ostensibly new vehicles have illegal tyres and that's staggering so the initial research you did showed quite a significant number of tyres that were illegal below 1.6mm at the time they were changed, didn't it?

**Stuart:** Yes, the owner of that vehicle or the company that booked in a regular replacement, or from an MOT advisory, the owner of the vehicle has already made a decision to replace that tyre. That's the importance of this research. They seem to be surprised that the retailer tells them that tyre is already illegal, so that's alarming - people are, again and I think this goes across company car drivers and grey fleet drivers, to raise the awareness of the consequences. We have talked about collisions and serious crashes but actually the potential consequence includes 3 points for an illegal tyre and up to £2500 fine so if you're driving on business you're putting your licence at risk as well as your ability to drive on business if you lose your licence.

**Simon:** An interesting point about the 3 points and the £2500 fine – just to reiterate that is per tyre. The police have the ability to give you those points for each tyre so if you do have 4 bald tyres they can give you 12 points and a £10,000 fine.

**Stuart:** Well, the courts can, and for multiple tyre failures they'd look at it more seriously, and it gives the police the ability to prosecute. Where there are multiple tyres they are more likely to go for a prosecution rather than giving you a producer to get that tyre sorted. Another piece of research we are doing this year, we have worked with the police where there has been a collision and the vehicle has not been able to be driven away and it's been taken to a police compound, we thank the police forces who have supported us, to understand that once a collision has taken place, what was the condition of those tyres? One of the things we have found is that the initial cause might be an innocuous bump, so maybe no one has been prosecuted but we have been able to look at the tyres and take them off to

look at them. I think many of the listeners will be surprised that the state of those tyres – many had damage - sidewall damage, many had actually been repaired, and we're not saying they're all company vehicles, but many had unseen damage and were not being checked and this had led to a failure of the tyre, and collisions waiting to happen. One of the most alarming statistics was that the oldest tyre we found was manufactured in 1981. That was still being driven until the incident occurred so there are some very old tyres out there. Is it any wonder that sometimes they fail.

**Simon:** You mentioned grey fleet where employees are using their own cars for work and it's a significant amount of business traffic. Recent estimates before COVID were around 14 million that use their own cars for business journeys in some form. That may well have increased as some employees are designated as working from home – so for employers that think they manage tyres on their company vehicles they still have to think about the employees who are using their own cars for work. Effectively the company is commandeering that vehicle as a company car for that journey, so they have that legal responsibility. Generally, they have much less oversight over the condition of that vehicle and its tyres so where people have repaired tyres, where people are running a 40 year old tyre, which is ridiculous, but tyres have a shelf life and I know TyreSafe have done a lot of work around 2nd hand tyres so businesses have a lot to think about when it comes to grey fleet.

**Stuart:** Absolutely and that's the point of working with Driving for Better Business to raise awareness of these issues that people may not have been aware of. One of the things from working with yourself over the years, we're talking about correct company policies and procedures to protect the company if the police or the HSE knock on the door to tell you someone from your business has been involved in a crash, and what we are seeing is more than half of the tyres have some form of damage in air, condition or tread damage and this could lead to prosecution of directors or fleet managers for example, where it has been perceived that this has been an ongoing issue - so I think it's important we get the message across – to have the correct policies in place as a form of insurance. Under the Road Traffic Act to use, cause or commit an offence if the company knows about this or hasn't got correct policies under the Health and Safety at Work Act and various legislation, the companies could find themselves under investigation and potentially prosecuted. I like the message within Driving for Better Business around the legal and the moral and the financial responsibility. We talked about the moral – it's important that business are operating correctly and helping to reduce the risk to their own work force and to the general public – but also to look after the financial aspects – it's a false economy not to be looking after your tyres and can lead to significant costs – also reputational damage, if your vehicles are involved in a tyre blow out, and we see pictures of branded vehicles on the network. The financial aspects of not getting the policy right can be significant.

**Simon:** I think it's interesting on some of that important research – as you release the findings, we will share that with our audience as well. I believe that part of what you want to do is grow its presence among road risk stakeholders' management. How do you plan to make the TyreSafe campaign relevant to fleet operators and driver safety managers?

**Stuart:** I want to keep moving it forward so that TyreSafe is seen to be an integral part of the road safety agenda – not just an add-on. Whether we talk about the SAFE system and of course the vehicle, the people, the impact of this particular area, the research we've done at the crash compound – all this feeds into the post collision understanding on cause – so I want to help to continue to raise awareness to support our partners whether that's the police, the DVSA, the inspectors, local authorities as they develop and support their local strategies. We want to support the national Government Strategy. There's a lot that TyreSafe can do to raise awareness of what can be done – most of this is within the vehicle owners and operators remit to significantly reduce the risk. We will continue to develop new innovative

campaigns as we move forward. This year's campaigns – we would love your listeners to log in to TyreSafe.org and to use that campaign material. And to check your tyres and to make some corrective measures if required. Check your tyres regularly, your pressures - this year's campaign will be around, 'if your tyres don't stop you, what will?' Another vehicle? If you stepped out into the road, a potential crash barrier or street furniture you could potentially hit, causing huge financial and other drastic consequences to the driver and the business itself. There are great opportunities to work with partners and that's what I want to do – to continue to develop these partnerships and to grow it so it becomes almost an integral part of the mindset of getting in your vehicle. You know your tyres are safe and you are fit to go onto the network.

Another part of this year's campaign is a reminder of TPMS – tyre pressure monitoring systems. Many people don't understand that cars have them, and we hear alarming stories that people are taking the fuse out when the light comes on, when they go for an MOT. They don't understand what that means and the potential consequences, including fatal consequences of driving with under-inflated or over-inflated tyres. We have an animation for fleet managers which your listeners can look at on our website, so if the light does come on, they will know what it is! By joining and supporting TyreSafe you have access to all these resources and the back catalogue of resources which businesses can use as part of their efforts to raise awareness across their drivers and fleets, to reduce risks in relation to tyre failures.

**Simon:** That's brilliant Stuart – DfBB has a focus now on the broader subject of vehicle safety so throughout October we will be supporting TyreSafe safety month and campaign - so within our resource bank we have a lot of resources that can help with tyre safety and can be shared with drivers. I know that on your website you have animations and banners and information and infographics that employers can share with their drivers. I'd encourage any fleet manager or business owner to go to [tyresafe.org](http://tyresafe.org) and download those resources and share far and wide – not just your company drivers but staff who drive privately as well. You've invested in them as an employer. The tyre safety message is important for everybody.

Thanks for a fascinating discussion, Stuart, and I wish you well in your new position – and look forward in continuing the work we do in the future.

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**Simon:** If you manage drivers and their vehicles, and you face similar issues to those discussed in this podcast, there are links in the show notes to some useful resources on the Driving for Better Business website. And these are all free to access. If you enjoyed the conversation, please don't forget to hit subscribe - so you know when the next episode is released. And please also give us a 5-star review, as this helps us to get up the podcast rankings, and makes it more visible to others who might also find it useful. You can follow us – that's Driving for Better Business on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. And most importantly, please help us to spread the word. All our resources are free for those who manage fleets and their employees who drive for work. Thank you for listening to Let's Talk Fleet Risk, and I look forward to welcoming you to the next episode.