

'Enforce stricter GPS rules'

Experts call for revocation of operating permits, criminal charges

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PETALING JAYA: A failure to comply with the mandatory installation of Global Positioning Systems (GPS) in commercial vehicles or attempts to hoodwink the authorities with a dummy device should warrant a revocation of operating permits, say road safety experts.

Road Safety Council of Malaysia executive council member Datuk Suret Singh said the scheduled industry code of practice audits, which are conducted on all lorries and bus operators, entail the installation of GPS and check if a company has a safety officer.

The audit also determines if journeys taken by the commercial vehicle are monitored and complaints of misconduct are addressed by the company.

"The audit also examines if pre-journey safety checks on the vehicle's condition are carried out and if drivers are fit to undertake the trip.

"Despite all these stringent checks, if some companies opt to install a dummy GPS, then they are sending a message that they do not care about the safety of other road users," he said.

In such cases, Suret said the authorities should come down hard on these rogue operators,

revoke their permits and not let them off with just a warning.

"Stern action such as suspending or revoking the permit should be the new policy.

"Operators who run their fleet of vehicles responsibly and ethically should be given more opportunity," said the former Malaysian Institute of Road Safety Research chairman.

Road safety expert Law Teik Hua said heavy vehicle operators resort to dummy GPS due to financial and operational factors.

"Some view GPS tracking as an unnecessary cost, particularly if they think they can evade fines.

"Others disable or fake tracking in a bid to hide unsafe practices such as drivers exceeding hours on duty or driving via dangerous shortcuts," said Law, who heads Universiti Putra Malaysia's Road Safety Research Centre.

Law said GPS tampering enables wrongdoing such as cargo theft or smuggling, adding that the absence of real-time tracking prevents fleet managers from acting fast during emergencies such as breakdowns or accidents.

He said authorities need to conduct random checks to ensure not just the presence of GPS devices but also real-time operability.

"Sanctions for dummy or inoperable tracking systems must be stringent to discourage non-compliance, such as hefty fines or

revocation of operating permits.

"Transport businesses, on the other hand, must be incentivised to install tamper-evident telematics systems with capabilities such as automatic notification of signal loss or tampering."

Law said real-time GPS tracking is a safety measure to prevent accidents, hold drivers accountable and streamline logistics.

"Ghost GPS defeats these advantages, inflicting unwarranted danger on the whole road community.

"With improved enforcement, more transparency and use of improved technology, the industry can transition to safer, more trustworthy means of managing fleets," said Law.

A ghost GPS is a decoy tracker used to mislead the actual GPS device, usually hidden elsewhere in a vehicle.

Traffic consultant Dr Rosli Azad Khan said the use of dummy GPS devices by heavy vehicle operators is deeply disturbing as it reflects a culture of impunity and disregard for safety regulations.

Rosli said that under the Land Public Transport Act 2010, the use of functioning GPS devices is a legal requirement.

"The purpose is clear to monitor vehicle speed, track location, ensure safe driving behaviour and allow operators to act swiftly when any violations occur,"

added Rosli.

To address the issue, he called for the Land Public Transport Agency (Apad) and the Transport Ministry to launch an urgent audit on commercial vehicle operators with random roadside inspections.

Rosli also proposed that criminal charges be levelled against those who install fake GPS systems in heavy vehicles.

"Charges under criminal code, not just transport laws, must be considered," he said.

Rosli said repeat offenders should be blacklisted from holding any public service vehicle permits and GPS data should be streamed live to a central monitoring system under Apad or the Road Transport Department (JPJ).

"The government should expedite the installation of dashboard cameras or dashcams in heavy commercial vehicles.

"The proposed dashcam regulation must not be delayed beyond the first quarter of next year," added Rosli.

Issues with dummy GPS came to the surface after a preliminary report of a road crash in Teluk Intan on May 13, which killed nine Federal Reserve Unit officers.

The report revealed that the tipper lorry involved was overloaded by more than 70%, failed its safety inspection and had no seat belts or headrests for passengers.