



Police across regions cite reckless driving, poor vehicle condition, and negligence as primary causes of accidents. PHOTO/FILE

Why Uganda must act on deadly highway breakdowns

Broken-down and poorly parked trucks are turning Uganda's highways into deadly zones. Enforcing timely removal, improving maintenance, and creating safe parking spaces could be the difference between near-misses and fatal crashes.

BY GEOFFREY OYET OKWERA

Last week, Gerald Ofwono was returning to Kampala from his village in Tororo, eastern Uganda, after inspecting his countryside businesses. Most of the journey had been smooth until he reached Muliita, just past Iganga District.

Ahead, a sugarcane truck sat parked dangerously on the highway with no warning signs or reflective indicators. Traffic was moving at full speed. Reaction time was measured in seconds.

Thanks to his driver's quick thinking, disaster was narrowly avoided. The vehicle swerved off the road without overturning, and everyone inside escaped unharmed, though shaken.

Unfortunately, Ofwono's close call is not unique. Uganda's major highways, including Kampala-Gulu, Kampala-Masaka, Jinja-Kampala, and Iganga-Mbale, have become hotspots for accidents caused by trucks breaking down in dangerous spots.

The toll

The cost is mounting. On March 1,



WHAT YOU CAN DO

Encountering a broken-down truck or trailer carelessly parked on the highway can be dangerous—not just for you, but for every road user. Taking action could save lives.

If you come across one:

- Slow down immediately and keep a safe distance.
- Sudden swerves can cause even worse accidents.
- Turn on your hazard lights to alert drivers behind you.
- Avoid overtaking blindly, especially on narrow roads or bends where visibility is limited.

• Stay alert for pedestrians or mechanics who may be working around the vehicle without proper warning signs.

Most importantly, report the hazard so authorities can respond quickly:

- Uganda Police (Traffic): 099
- Toll-free: 0800 199 999
- WhatsApp: 0779 999 999

When reporting, try to share clear details: the exact location (nearest town, landmark, or kilometre mark), the condition of the vehicle, and whether there are warning signs in place.

in Girigiri Village on the Mayuge-Namayingo Road, five people from the same family died when a TATA truck rammed into them after they had stopped because of another broken-down vehicle.

On March 21, in Jinja, a taxi collided with a stationary sugarcane truck at Kagoma Hill in Buwenge Town Council, killing one person and injuring several others. Police attributed the crash to reckless overtaking and poor night visibility.

Perhaps the most haunting case remains that of businessman Apollo Nyegamehe, popularly known as Aponye, who in 2023 died after his vehicle hit a stationary Fuso truck on the Mbarara-Kabale Highway, parked in the dark with no warning signals.

Why trucks break down

Stephen Chandiga, a Kampala mechanic, says the root causes are largely preventable. Many transport operators prioritise delivery schedules over routine maintenance. Delayed oil changes, worn brakes, faulty lighting, and neglected tyre replacements are common faults.

"Like the human body, trucks need regular check-ups, especially for long trips," Chandiga says. "Preventive maintenance is far less costly than dealing with breakdowns or fatal crashes."

Overloading is another silent killer. Trucks carrying more than their recommended weight strain axles, tyres, and engines, reducing stability and making them harder to control on curves, steep slopes, or in bad weather.

The statistics are stark. Uganda Police Force's 2024 Annual Crime Re-

port recorded 25,107 road accidents and 25,808 casualties nationwide in the first half of 2023 alone. Traffic police caught more than 9,450 trucks loading passengers in excess, a practice that increases instability and physical stress.

Truck drivers' dilemma

Truck drivers are often victims of circumstances. At the Busia border, a queue for up to two kilometres at night, drivers risk theft, bags, and even their lives. Staying in the queue could cost them their business.

Benard Jenga recalls a Sunday robbery where thieves stole his money (about Shs 124,000) and personal belongings. Others lose fuel supplies and street children.

Local authorities struggle to find alternatives. Plans for a parking area in Soffa village were shelved to make way for a Ministry of Health border hospital. In Mbale, designated parking areas are either unusable or too far from the highway. In Kabale, attempts to create safe parking along highways have clashed with infrastructure development plans.

The law and the gap

Uganda's Traffic and Road Safety Act requires broken-down vehicles to be removed within six hours in rural areas and two hours in urban areas. Enforcement, however, is inconsistent. Police advise that reflective warning triangles be placed both in front of and behind any stranded vehicle, and the nearest station notified. Motorists can report abandoned vehicles via a toll-free number (0800 199 999) or WhatsApp (0779 999 999).

Despite a 2023 parliamentary motion to enforce Sections 57-59 of the Roads Act 2019, which allow for the removal and auctioning of abandoned vehicles, the problem persists nearly three years later. Police across regions cite reckless driving, poor vehicle condition, and negligence as primary causes of accidents. Kiira Region Police specifically warn about poorly parked sugarcane trucks with faulty lights, worn brakes, and missing number plates.

Infrastructure challenges

The crisis is not only about drivers. Uganda's road network is deteriorating. MPs have highlighted stalled projects, poor maintenance, and a funding gap of Shs2.472 trillion for FY2025/2026.

Works minister Gen Edward Kannyo ba Wamala warns that delayed maintenance could cost up to Shs120b in avoidable losses.

Overloaded trucks exacerbate road damage, creating a vicious cycle: damaged roads lead to more breakdowns, which increase the risk of crashes.

What must change

Police advise drivers to inspect their vehicles before journeys, follow traffic rules, and for truck owners to comply with axle load limits:

Maximum Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW) of 56 tonnes for seven-axle configurations
Maximum 10 tonnes for single axles, 18 tonnes for tandem axles, and 24 tonnes for tridem axles. Recent government measures, including a crackdown on unroadworthy trucks, is starting April 8, a step forward, but stationary trucks remain a pressing danger.

MPs and experts call for affordable, reliable transport solutions for traders and safe parking areas for trucks. Without these measures, roads will continue to be deadly corridors rather than pathways for progress.

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