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As mandates loom, it's getting harder to 'just keep truckin'

By MELISSA CROCKETT MESKE
macmeske@ibjonline.com

The trucking industry, in Illinois as well as in the other 49 states, operates under an extensive list of regulations designed with good intentions: To ensure the safety of drivers, other motorists, pedestrians, and the environment in which we all live.

These regulations cover everything, from drive times and down times to emissions standards and the movement to zero emission, electric vehicles (EVs). And looming near the top of that very lengthy list: Environmental and labor laws. Laws that are now throwing up roadblocks and taking their toll on an industry already crippled by a shortage of available labor, the higher costs of doing business, and still more.

In a story written by Jeannine Otto and published by AgriNews in late March 2023, Mid-West Trucking Association Executive Vice President Don Schaefer shared: "It is scary right now... And our industry has a bull's-eye on its forehead."



As the sun sets during the 7 p.m. hour on a recent Tuesday evening, the truck parking is already at near capacity at the rest area located along Interstate 55 in Madison County. (Melissa Crockett Meske/Illinois Business Journal)

Schaefer noted that both compliance with environmental regulations and labor laws are of concern, and are costly. Compliance could force the smaller trucking firms and independent operators out of business, in fact. MTA members, including ag

industry and construction truckers as well as those from other industries, have repeatedly voiced their concerns when talking with Schaefer and with state lawmakers.

Two laws that exist now in California are being looked at for imple-

mentation in Illinois that specifically address environmental and labor legislation for the trucking industry.

Written to be stricter than current federal standards are the California Air Resources Board emissions requirements. Now viewed as model environmental legislation for the trucking industry, as of Jan. 1, 2023, for example, all Class 7 (gross vehicle weight rating between 26,001 and 33,000 pounds) and Class 8 (GVWR exceeding 33,000 pounds) diesel-fueled trucks in California were required to have 2010 or newer model year engines.

Fourteen states have already adopted some or parts of California-led emissions regulations, and there is a push to do so now in Illinois. While noting that their regulations have improved the environment, Schaefer said Illinois is not set up for this.

The NET-Z coalition is further pushing the state to enact legislation to mandate an increasing percentage of heavy- and medium-duty trucks sold in Illinois to be electric or hydrogen fuel cell vehicles. This coalition is composed of environmental, community and labor groups demanding the adoption of the Advanced Clean Trucks, or ACT, Rule.

The ACT Rule has different benchmarks for different types of vehicles, but its essence is that nearly all new trucks and delivery vans would be at zero emissions just 17 years from now, by 2040.

NET-Z is also calling for the adoption of the Heavy-Duty Omnibus Rule, involving state mandates for stricter nitrogen oxide emissions controls on new fossil fuel trucks.

"It is not like all the trucks sold have to be electric immediately under the Advanced Clean Trucks rule," said J.C. Kibbey of the Natural Resources Defense Council in a recent story published by Energy News Network. "It's a very gradual ramp, and the omnibus emissions reduction rule could be 'the peanut butter to the ACT's jelly,' reducing emissions from fossil fuel trucks as the transition to zero emissions plays out."

BUILD St. Louis podcast launches, hosted by veteran journalist and IBJ founder

By MELISSA CROCKETT MESKE
macmeske@ibjonline.com



Kerry Smith

Kerry Smith, the original founder of the Illinois Business Journal, has stepped into the digital media platform spotlight as she launches and leads a new podcast: BUILD St. Louis.

Back in 2000, Smith had a vision of leading a business news publication focused on Southwestern Illinois, and she launched the Illinois Business Journal that fall. And in 2003, she reinforced that vision with Alan J. Ortvals, bringing him on board at that time as its co-owner.

After 13 years at its helm as founding president/CEO, and as its first editor, Smith passed the torch on to Ortvals and its next partner/editor, Dennis Grubaugh. She returned to the IBJ briefly in 2018 as marketing manager.

Smith has remained a reputable media mainstay throughout the St.

Louis market since her tenure at the IBJ, evidenced by the indelible marks of her visionary content and storytelling talents throughout the metro region.

By launching her own content writing and editing firm, Informationworks, she continued her work with clients from a myriad of industries including construction, engineering, architecture, commercial real estate, transportation, economic development and more. She also filled the editor role for St. Louis CNR, a bi-monthly magazine for the St. Louis commercial construction and design industry.

With this new podcast launched on May 1, BUILD St. Louis just seems like a natural next step for Smith.

"After interviewing and learning from the brightest minds in construction and real estate development for more than 20 years as a print journalist, I often regretted the fact that, due to a word count limit on printed stories, so much of the expertise I'd gleaned from subject matter experts wasn't shared with readers," Smith said.

"Also, frequently during these interview conversations, an additional concept or entire topic popped up that we weren't able to explore due to time constraints and content limits. It seemed like a natural evolution to create a podcast that could capture so much more of the heart of these discussions. Not to replace traditional journalistic content, BUILD St. Louis is the go-to

podcast for our region that expands and grows these conversations," she added.

As for the "nuts and bolts" of BUILD St. Louis, it is an audio, recorded podcast, with each episode lasting approximately 20 minutes. The first six episodes launched May 1. These will be followed by a new episode each week. The podcast is available through Apple, Google and Spotify platforms.

Invited guests are top executives from public and private organizations that are specific to the fields of construction (including design and engineering) and real estate development.

Smith's first six guests that are part of the May 1 episode launch include St. Louis Regional Freightway's Mary Lamie, Mid-America Carpenters Regional Council's Scott Byrne, BARBERMURPHY's Steve Zuber, Clayco's Sandra Marks, SIUE's Tim Sullivan, and Sandberg Phoenix's Quinn Murphy.

Early sponsors of the BUILD St. Louis weekly podcast include Contegra, BARBERMURPHY, Clayco, Sandberg Phoenix, S. M. Wilson, Trivers Associates, Midas Construction and KWAME Building Group. Smith noted that additional sponsorship opportunities are still available.

Anyone interested in learning more about the newly launched BUILD St. Louis podcast can reach out to Smith at kerry@informationworks.org or (618) 225-2253.