



CBS EVENING NEWS
Thursday, July 30, 2009, 6:30 PM EST

COURIC: And now to a highway danger you may not be aware of-- a government report spelled it out today. Hundreds of bus and truck companies that were ordered off the road for safety violations are still operating. As Don Teague reports, they're using the same vehicles. All that's been changed is their names.

DON TEAGUE, CBS CORRESPONDENT: They're among the most horrific accidents on America's highways-- crashes involving chartered buses. This one killed 17 people last year near Sherman, Texas.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: We've got people crushed underneath the bus. The bus is smoking!

TEAGUE: Investigators determined this bus company violated federal laws by using retreaded front tires and was operating after their license was taken away. It was among some 220 bus companies ordered shut down in 2007 and 2008 for safety violations. But the GAO has now found at least 20 of the companies are operating again illegally, under different names. They found even more rogue trucking companies with more than 1,000 possible reincarnations.

GREGORY KUTZ, U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE: It's very easy to reincarnate. It's kind of like going to the mall and getting a new set of clothes. You put the clothes on, you look a little different, but you're really the same person.

TEAGUE: Greg Kurtz says unsafe operators still roll along America's roadways, because there aren't enough investigators to catch them all, or penalties tough enough to stop them. So how dangerous are rogue operators? **Well, the American Bus Association says 50 percent of fatal bus accidents involve operators who should have never been on the road in the first place.** All of which makes things more difficult for responsible operators like Bill Austin, in business for 17 years.

BILL AUSTIN: For those of us that spend the money to do it right, yes, it hurts from the perspective that the impression of the general public is tarnished.

TEAGUE: Austin says he welcomes congressional efforts to strengthen oversight of charter bus companies, anything that keeps unsafe operators off the roads. Don Teague, CBS News, Dallas.