Through the first half of the year, commercial truck sales fell by 29.2% compared with the first half of 2019. Heavy-duty truck sales during the first six months of 2020 totaled 82,648, down 38.7% compared with the same period in 2019. Medium-duty truck sales fell as well, declining by 18.6% compared with the first half of 2019. In June, Class 8 truck sales totaled 13,276, down by 41.9% compared with June of last year and below the replacement demand level of some 16,000 units per month. Although sales are still down significantly compared with 2019, the June sales numbers were a welcome improvement when compared with April and May.

In the second quarter, trucking activity was heavily dependent on supply-chain variables. Freight companies operating in supply chains that handle essential goods, such as grocery stores, saw high levels of demand. But trucking companies operating in supply chains that were negatively impacted by the COVID-19 lockdowns saw freight activity decline. These regional and industry-dependent trends also affected commercial truck dealers. In the southern part of the country, many dealers who sell trucks for use in the oil and gas industries saw demand for trucks drop when oil prices fell after the lockdowns. Likewise, dealers who sell trucks for use in the auto-manufacturing sector saw a decrease in demand once vehicle plants shut down. But dealers near supply chains for essential goods saw less of a sales decline.

With less activity in their dealerships during the lockdowns, many ATD members reached out to existing customers and encouraged them to bring in their idle trucks for recall work. Handling such repairs during normal economic times means taking a truck out of service, which affects business income. Many truck dealerships also offered truck-sanitization services and, at the same time, made sure their customer service lounges were thoroughly cleaned and sanitized.

As with most industries, truck sales the rest of the year will be dependent on the ability to control the spread of COVID-19. Additional regional outbreaks could result in further lockdowns and disruptions to various supply chains. For the rest of the year, we expect truck sales will be down compared with 2019.