

NEW STANDARDS FOR ENTRY-LEVEL TRUCK DRIVERS



FMCSA

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration

The U.S. Dept of Transportation's Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) recently announced that it has proposed new federal CDL training standards for entry-level commercial truck and bus operators. The standards were proposed to ensure that commercial vehicle drivers receive the necessary behind-the-wheel training to safely operate a large truck or motorcoach.

The first of the proposed standards is for applicants seeking a Class A CDL (for combination tractor-trailer type vehicles weighing 26,001 lbs or more). It would require that an entry-level CDL applicant have a minimum of 30 hours of behind-the-wheel training from a training program that meets FMCSA standards, including 10 hours of operating the vehicle on a practice driving range.

The second proposed standard is for applicants seeking a Class B CDL (for heavy straight trucks such as a dump truck or box truck, school bus, city transit bus, or motorcoach). This standard would require a minimum of 15 hours of behind-the-wheel training, including a minimum of seven hours of training on a practice driving range.

The number of classroom instruction hours was not specified for either of the newly proposed standards; and under the proposal, military drivers, farmers, and firefighters would continue to remain generally exempt for the federal CDL requirements.

The new standards would apply to:

- First-time CDL applicants
- Current CDL holders seeking a license upgrade (eg from Class B to Class A) or seeking an additional endorsement (eg. To transport hazardous materials or double/triple trailers)
- A previously disqualified CDL holder seeking to re-acquire a license

According to U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx, "Well-trained drivers are safer drivers, which leads to greater safety for our families and friends on our highways and roads." The ultimate goal of these new standards is to enhance highway safety.

Regardless of the newly proposed number of behind-the-wheel hours required, training providers must not issue a training certificate unless the student has demonstrated proficiency in driving a commercial vehicle. Meeting the number of BTW hours alone does not constitute driving competency.

The Commercial Vehicle Training Association notes that curricula at CVTA -member schools already include 40 hours of BTW training, even higher than the proposed new standards. Subsequently, the standard will be especially helpful in weeding out CDL "mills" and holding driving school accountable for quality training programs as well as the caliber of students they graduate.



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