



An Aging Driver Force

Due to the economic conditions during the past three years, talk of a driver shortage has all but gone away. However, as we look into the future the threat a driver shortage looms as a “perfect storm.” There are many variables that would have an impact on the shortage.

During the last three years many motor carriers have stopped hiring drivers and in some cases have terminated good qualified drivers. One element of the potential coming driver shortage is an aging workforce combined with a decline in the primary demographic group that comprises the bulk of the driver pool. As we see freight volumes increase, many fleets are experiencing difficulty in attracting qualified drivers and may be unable to seat trucks or add capacity at a time when freight volumes are growing. If current demographic trends continue, that shortage of truck drivers could increase to 111,000 by 2014. As transportation managers we are seeing our driver work force continue to age. The average age of a truck driver in the United States is over 48 years. Since 2000, the number of service and truck drivers 55 or older has surged 19%, to about 616,000, according to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. Truck companies with baby boomer drivers insist their safety record is at least as good as that of younger drivers. This is absolutely a segment of our driving force that we need and depend on. As all of us age, we do not physically or mentally age at the same rate.

The FMCSA does not have a maximum age limit for drivers of commercial motor vehicles unlike that of the FAA concerning pilots. All drivers are subject to the medical qualifications of medical certification requirements of CFR 391.

But, the question remains, how do we as transportation managers know when it is time to ask for the keys of a driver that is no longer able to operate safely?



Here are some suggestions:

- 1) Develop a proactive safety and loss control program with policies and procedure that are not bias to age.
- 2) Require all drivers to have physical examinations completed by company doctor who is knowledgeable of the FMCSA regulations regarding physical qualifications of drivers.
- 3) Develop job descriptions and job requirements for all positions based on actual requirements of the job activity.
- 4) Implement a defensive driver training program with updated training annually for all drivers.
- 5) Administer structured check rides at least annually to all drivers to assess the driver's skills and abilities.
- 6) Develop a continuing relationship with all drivers to keep an open line of communication regarding the driver's ability to complete their driving responsibilities safely.
- 7) Be vigilant and observant of the actions of all drivers.

FMCSA TO REOPEN DOCKET FOR HOS COMMENTS

On May 6 the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration announced it would reopen the docket for comments on the driver hours of service proposed rulemaking. [76 Federal Register 26681](#) (May 9, 2011). In addition, the FMCSA placed four additional research studies in the official rulemaking docket for the HOS proposal.

The four studies are: *The Impact of Driving, Non-Driving Work, and Rest Breaks on Driving Performance in Commercial Motor Vehicle Operations*; *Hours of Service and Driver Fatigue-Driver Characteristics Research*; *Analysis of the Relationship Between Operator Cumulative Driving Hours and Involvement in Preventable Collisions*; and *Potential Causes Of Driver Fatigue: A Study On Transit Bus Operators In Florida*.

The FMCSA is reopening the HOS Notice of Proposed Rulemaking comment period to allow for public review and discussion of these studies. The agency stated that it “is committed to receiving and analyzing all public comments on the studies before it completes its work on the final rule,” and, therefore, will extend the final rule publication date. ***The new deadline for receipt of additional comments is June 8, 2011.***

Now is the time for you as a motor carrier to make your voice heard regarding the proposed regulation changes!
GThttp://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/rules-regulations/topics/hos-proposed/comments.aspx

Because the current HOS rulemaking resulted from settlement of a court challenge to the rulemaking establishing the existing HOS rules, the FMCSA has advised parties to the settlement agreement of the need for an extended rulemaking schedule. The settlement agreement called for FMCSA to publish a final rule by July 26, 2011, but that deadline will now be extended.

The research studies are available on the FMCSA website at www.fmcsa.dot.gov

News: Mark your Calendars now for the Upcoming Roadcheck 2011

Starting on June 7 through June 9, approximately 10,000 specially-trained and certified officers will blanket North America's roadways to prevent truck and bus accidents and save lives.