

TRUCK TALK

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Getting Back to Basics

There are many, many issues facing the transportation industry: CSA 2010, Distracted Driving, Sleep Apnea, Hours of Service, Safety Management System, Text Messaging, and on and on. Yes, these are all important issues and require our attention and focus. However, it is important that we not forget about the basics of operating a commercial motor vehicle and complying with all the requirements of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

According to part 391 of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations, there are 10 requirements a driver must meet in order to operate a commercial motor vehicle, which are all pretty basic:

1. Be in good health and physically able to perform all duties of a driver.
2. Be at least 21 years of age.
3. Speak and read English well enough to converse with the general public, understand highway traffic signs, respond to official questions, and be able to make legible entries on reports and records.
4. Be able to drive the vehicle safely.
5. Know how to safely load and properly block, brace and secure the cargo.
6. Have only one valid commercial vehicle operator's license.
7. Provide an employing motor carrier with a list of all motor vehicle violations or a signed statement that the driver has not been convicted of any motor vehicle violations during the past 12 months. A disqualified driver must not be allowed to drive a commercial motor vehicle for any reason.
8. Pass a driver's road test or equivalent.
9. Complete an application for employment.
10. Possess a valid medical certificate.

Let's look at #8 above, the driver's road test. The regulations read "A person must not be allowed to drive a commercial motor vehicle until he/she has successfully completed a road test and has been issued a certificate or a copy of the license or certificate which the motor carrier accepted as equivalent to the driver's road test pursuant to Section 391.33".

Yes, Section 391.33 says that a motor carrier does not have to actually give a prospective driver a road test at all, but can accept a copy of the commercial driver's license issued by the driver's state of residence, or they can accept a road test certificate from another motor carrier if the road test from the other motor carrier was given within the past 3 years. That sure cuts down on the paperwork when you are completing the driver's qualification file. Just make a photo copy of the CDL, staple it to the road test form and you are good to go. Simple, easy. Takes only a minute or less.

HOWEVER, do you really know if that driver can actually operate your truck? Are you aware of the exposures you, as an employer, accept when you hire someone to drive for you? Or do you take it for granted that he/she knows how to drive a truck, and you accept the word of a state commercial licensing examiner or perhaps a motor carrier in another state that issued the driver a road test certificate?

"But this driver applicant has been driving all over the United States for 20 years. Surely I don't have to give a road test to this person" you might ask. Yes you should! Here are just a few reasons why:

Even drivers with lots of experience should be road tested because along with the experience comes a lot of bad habits. Would you be willing to bet that if you give a driver with 20 years of experience that they will neglect to include a pre-trip inspection as part of the road test? A driver that really knows what they are doing would expect a road test as an opportunity to prove their skills. They appreciate working for a motor carrier that requires testing and who provides training. Would you like to be sitting in a courtroom in the witness box after an accident and have a plaintiff's attorney ask you "How did you know that this driver knew how to operate your truck?" A road test provides the very best environment to also check a driver's attitude. When you give a driver a road test, you are in their office, not yours.

Don't take for granted that the driver applicant knows how to drive your truck. The road test should **always** be part of the driver qualification process. The days of giving a driver a tractor, trailer, and a full load of cargo (not to mention a full fuel tank) and saying "call us in the morning" are long gone. You need to give, and document, a detailed road test; it is the best way to do things the right way.

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