Although it had planned to institute universal training standards for entry-level truck drivers, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) has announced that it will be delaying the training requirements for two years.

The Entry-Level Driver Training (ELDT) guidelines were intended to take effect on February 7, 2020, but the compliance date has been pushed back to February 7, 2022. According to the FMCSA, the delay will help establish important IT infrastructure that will act as a registry of compliant programs. However, the delay will also result in a continuance of under-trained entry-level truck drivers on the road, creating risk for travelers.

“Following a careful review of the public comments regarding the Entry-Level Training (ELDT) rule, FMCSA is extending the rule’s implementation for two years. This extension is reflective of the agency’s continued efforts to develop a secure and effective electronic trainer provider registry for the new rule. The agency remains committed to making the implementation of the rule as efficient and effective as possible,” FMCSA said in a statement.

FMCSA will be publishing the decision to delay the compliance requirements with the Federal Register and will accept public comments for 45 days afterward.
Current training requirements

Currently, there are limited federal requirements for obtaining a commercial driver’s license. Although there are many schools that provide thorough training for newbie truck drivers, there are currently no federal oversight of the process or universal standards for training new driver on necessary knowledge and skills. The minimum requirements that applicants for a CDL must meet include:

- A valid regular (non-commercial) driver’s license and be at least 18 years old (in most states) to drive intrastate;
- Be at least 21 years old to drive interstate;
- Have at least one or two years of driving experience;
- An applicant “must provide to the State proof of citizenship or lawful permanent residency” per 49 CFR 383.71.
- Pass all applicable background screens

Entry-level truck drivers must also self-certify health requirements by using authorized medical examiners on the National Medical Registry, pass written and knowledge exams, and pass skill and road testing for the class of commercial vehicle they are pursuing a license for.

Establishing new benchmarks

Once the new rules take effect, training programs across the country will be required to cover a standardized curriculum for entry-level drivers. The curriculum will include:

- Basic vehicle operation, control systems, and dashboard instruments
- Pre- and post-trip inspections
- Backing and docking
- Distracted driving
- Roadside inspections
- Whistleblower protections and procedures.

All training must be completed through an FMCSA-provider. Training requirements will apply both to schools and to fleets that provide in-house training to entry-level drivers. All training providers must be in the Training Provider Registry, which is currently under development. All CDL training organizations will self-register and self-certify that their program is in compliance.

Reactions to decision

Efforts to create training benchmarks for new drivers have been discussed for
decades, but the current standards under development were announced in December of 2016. The decision was finalized in 2017 in order to allow three years for the FMCSA, trainers, fleets, and states to get ready for the new compliance requirements. Some parties are supportive of the extra prep time current training programs will now have.

“I look at this as an opportunity for the schools to get ready,” Professional Truck Driver Institute (PTDI) Executive Director Tim Blum notes. “A lot don’t understand it, and a lot don’t even know about it. This is a period where we can help people.”

However, others express concern about the ongoing lack of training and the implications for driving safety. Don Lefeve, head of the Commercial Vehicle Training Association, said the group is frustrated by the delay. “The ball has been dropped,” he said.

This frustration is based on the reality that poorly trained, inexperienced truckers are much more likely to cause wrecks than those with more experience. One U.S. Department of Transportation report revealed that truckers with under five years of experience are 41% more likely to cause a crash than commercial drivers who have been on the road for five years or longer.

But, Lefeve adds, “I feel like the leadership of FMCSA understands the significance of the rule, and I feel like they have a plan for moving forward.”

**Rising risks in trucking**

It’s crucial that large commercial vehicle drivers are well-prepared to drive large trucks and have the specialized knowledge needed to navigate roads in adverse conditions. Without that proven knowledge, those who share the roads with truckers will be most at-risk, as 82% of fatalities in crashes involving large trucks were not occupants of the truck.

“This is a setback for the whole industry,” says John Kearney, CEO, Advanced Training Systems LLC, whose company is a leading designer and manufacturer of virtual simulators for driver training, among other applications. He goes on to add, “Trucking is facing a declining safety record. We are in need of efficient standards for entry-level truck driver training, and we need the government’s help to do it.”

COPYRIGHT © 2020, STARK & STARK

**Source URL:** [https://www.natlawreview.com/article/training-delays-entry-level-truck-drivers-poses-risks](https://www.natlawreview.com/article/training-delays-entry-level-truck-drivers-poses-risks)