

# DOT Announces New Hours-of-Service Limits for Commercial Truck Drivers

On December 27, 2011, the Department of Transportation's (DOT) Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) published The Hours of Service of Drivers Final Rule, which revises the hours-of-service (HOS) safety requirements for commercial truck drivers.

The final rule retains the current 11-hour daily driving limit. Major changes found in the rule include:

- Reducing, by 12 hours, the maximum number of hours a truck driver can work within a week from 82 hours within a seven-day period to 70 hours;
- Requiring truck drivers to take a break of at least 30 minutes before driving more than eight hours;
- Altering the definition of "on-duty time;" and
- Requiring truck drivers who maximize their weekly work hours to take at least two nights' rest from 1:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m.

The effective date of the new definition of "on-duty time" is **February 27, 2012**. The compliance date of the other provisions is **July 1, 2013**.

## BACKGROUND OF THE RULE

The FMCSA stated that the goal of the final rule is to reduce excessively long work hours that increase both the risk of fatigue-related crashes and long-term health problems for drivers. Recent studies have demonstrated that long work hours can lead to reduced sleep and chronic fatigue. Fatigued drivers have slowed reaction times and a reduced ability to assess situations quickly.

Recent research has also linked long work hours and reduced sleep to a range of serious health effects, including obesity, high blood pressure, other cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and sleep apnea. These conditions not only shorten drivers' lives, but also can result in substantial ongoing medical costs and put drivers' medical certifications at risk. Commercial motor vehicle (CMV) drivers suffer from these conditions at a higher rate than the population as a whole.

The final rule is intended to reduce the likelihood of driver fatigue, fatigue-related crashes and fatigue-related health effects. Although crash rates have been falling, thousands of people are still injured and killed in truck crashes each year, including hundreds of truck drivers. This rule will address one of the causes of those crashes.

The FMCSA estimates that the benefits of the rule (a reduction in crashes and improved driver health) will outweigh the costs. It has stated that the cost of the rule represents a small fraction of 1 percent of trucking industry revenues and is the cost-equivalent of less than a 3-cent-a-gallon increase in the price of diesel fuel to the long-haul industry.