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Full-Service Drug and Alcohol Testing Programs and Driver Qualification Services

March 07, 2003

Attn: Safety Manager

FMCSA EVALUATES GRADUATED COMMERCIAL DRIVER'S LICENSES

The *Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration* (FMCSA) is again considering implementing a Graduated Commercial Driver's License program. The program would require young truck drivers to gain a certain level of experience and expertise before they could be issued a non-restricted Commercial Driver's License (CDL). FMCSA is relying on feedback from motor carriers, CDL holders, industry groups and enforcement agencies to assist in establishing a plan. In this issue we will tell you what is being proposed and how to comment.

WHAT IS BEING PROPOSED - A Graduated Commercial Driver's License, or GCDL, would be given to an applicant to allow him/her to get experience driving a truck prior to being issued an unrestricted Commercial Driver's License. FMCSA believes this process would help to ease new drivers into the trucking environment by allowing them to progressively develop their driving skills in less risky situations. Drivers would then "graduate" to the unrestricted CDL level after a yet-to-be determined amount of time. FMCSA is also weighing two important factors of a GCDL program: "Should an applicant's past driving record affect his/her eligibility for a GCDL?" and "Should individuals aged 18-21 be eligible for a GCDL?"

THE PROS AND CONS OF A GCDL - Do younger, inexperienced truck drivers pose a greater risk? There are many who think so including the *Insurance Institute for Highway Safety*. According to their data, studies of young truck drivers confirm their crash risk matches the high risk of young and inexperienced drivers of passenger vehicles. Their research also found young truck drivers to have significantly increased probabilities of being involved in crashes with fatalities and serious injuries. The institute was very much against FMCSA's proposal to lower the age requirement for truck drivers through a pilot program back in 2000.

An initial focus group of truck and bus drivers, industry representatives and regulatory officials was overall in favor of a GCDL program. The focus group, however, also expressed concern over whether younger drivers (between the ages of 18 and 21) should be eligible for a GCDL.

IF YOU WISH TO COMMENT ON THIS ISSUE - FMCSA is asking for comment on a GCDL program. Specifically, FMCSA would like to know:

- Do you think a Graduated Commercial Driver's License (GCDL) is needed?
- Should the issuance of a GCDL be linked to enrollment in a Commercial Driver's License program?
- Should the curricula of a Commercial Driver's License program have to meet certain standards in order for a student to be eligible for a GCDL while in training?
- How much training and experience should new drivers receive before "graduating" to an unrestricted Commercial Driver's License?
- Should an applicant's past driving record be considered in issuing a GCDL?
- How many accidents and convictions should cause an applicant to be denied a GCDL?
- Should penalties for drivers holding a GCDL be more severe than for CDL holders?
- How much passenger car or light truck experience should an applicant have before being issued a GCDL?
- What types of restrictions should apply to entry level drivers operating with a GCDL?
- Should a fully licensed CDL driver be required to accompany a driver with a GCDL?
- What is the minimum age an applicant should be eligible for a GCDL?
- What is the minimum age an applicant should be eligible to receive an unrestricted CDL?
- How much testing should be given before an applicant can receive an unrestricted CDL?
- What other factors should FMCSA address with regards to a Graduated Commercial Driver's License program?
- What costs would you anticipate incurring if a GCDL program is implemented?

HOW TO RESPOND - If you wish to respond to FMCSA's inquiry you can mail your comments to the U.S. Department of Transportation, Room PL 401, 400 Seventh Street, SW., Washington, DC 20590-0001 or fax them to (202) 493-2251. Include the docket number, *FMCSA-2002-12334*, with your correspondence. FMCSA requests that you indicate your primary occupation when submitting your comments. Comments must be received before May 27, 2003.

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Full-Service Drug and Alcohol Testing Programs

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