

Turn Signals

The Latest News in Trucking Safety and Regulations

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Trucking companies should be alerting their commercial motor vehicle drivers that they must possess a copy of their Medical Examiner's Certificate, better known as the "wallet card", for another year. This longtime regulation requiring drivers to have proof of a current DOT physical was scheduled to end on January 30th. The plan after that was highway troopers would electronically access state data records for this information, and carriers would validate physicals by obtaining the driver's motor vehicle record (MVR) from the same sources. In mid-January, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration delayed the effective date a year because some states were unable to post the medical information to their MVR databases by the January 30th deadline.

Truckers operating in heavy winter conditions are facing more state fines if snow and ice fall off their rigs while motoring down the highway. A new law in Connecticut became effective on January 1st which can fine commercial motor vehicle drivers up to \$1,250 if snow or ice flying from their units causes any property damage or injury. Even if there is no accident, simply failing to clear the snow and ice from on top is a \$75 fine. Similar laws already exist in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The problem is how does one remove the frozen material from the top of trailers? No one has yet to invent an economical and effective solution. It is not safe for a driver to somehow climb on top of a tall trailer and remove it. And where would the driver leave the icy debris if he were able to scrape it off? No one wants it on their property. Everyone acknowledges that there is a problem but no one knows how to fix it.

The FMCSA recently released a study confirming the wisdom of using the agency's Pre-Employment Screening Program when qualifying drivers. The PSP program allows motor carriers to view a driver applicant's DOT record of inspections for the last 3 years and accidents for the last 5 years. The study shows that in the first year of availability of PSP data, which started in May 2010, trucking companies who used the program averaged a dramatic decrease in their crash rates by 8.0% and their driver out-of-service rates by 17.2%. For a modest annual fee, which is only \$25 for small carriers, plus \$10 per driver record accessed, the return on investment can be significant. This tool is highly recommended for companies of all sizes when deciding which drivers to hire.

The Pennsylvania legislature recently increased the state's top speed limit to 70 mph. No changes will take place until the state highway department conducts a 6-month study to determine which highways can handle the higher speed.

Did you know..... How do FMCSA and state agencies know if your company is not drug testing its drivers? Easy, your drivers tell them. It's a routine trooper technique to just ask your drivers on the highway if they were drug tested before being hired or if their company does random testing. Negative answers generate reports to headquarters to perform a compliance review. Motor carriers who do not perform the necessary testing face stiff fines and even shutdowns of their businesses. It is a very serious offense.