

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration**

[FMCSA Docket No. FMCSA-2004-19477]

Qualification of Drivers; Exemption Applications; Vision**AGENCY:** Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), DOT.**ACTION:** Notice of final disposition.

SUMMARY: The FMCSA announces its decision to exempt 29 individuals from the vision requirement in the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSRs). The exemptions will enable these individuals to qualify as drivers of commercial motor vehicles (CMVs) in interstate commerce without meeting the vision standard prescribed in 49 CFR 391.41(b)(10).

DATES: January 14, 2005.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Maggi Gunnels, Office of Bus and Truck Standards and Operations, (202) 366-4001, FMCSA, Department of Transportation, 400 Seventh Street, SW., Washington, DC 20590-0001. Office hours are from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., e.t., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**Electronic Access**

You may see all the comments online through the Document Management System (DMS) at: <http://dmses.dot.gov>.

Background

On November 8, 2004, the FMCSA published a notice of receipt of exemption applications from 29 individuals, and requested comments from the public (69 FR 64806). The 29 individuals petitioned the FMCSA for exemptions from the vision requirement in 49 CFR 391.41(b)(10), which applies to drivers of CMVs in interstate commerce. They are: Leonida R. Batista, Johnny Becerra, Larry W. Burnett, Ross E. Burroughs, Roger C. Carson, Lester W. Carter, Larry Chinn, Christopher L. DePuy, John B. Ethridge, Larry J. Folkerts, Randolph D. Hall, Richard T. Hatchel, Paul W. Hunter, Harold D. Jones, Lester G. Kelley II, Robert L. Lafollette, Ray P. Lenz, John M. Lonergan, Michael B. McClure, Lamont S. McCord, Francis M. McMullin, Joe L. Meredith, Jr., Norman Mullins, Harold W. Mumford, Charles R. O'Connell, Dennis R. O'Dell, Jr., Virgil A. Potts, Clarence H. Redding, and David J. Triplett.

Under 49 U.S.C. 31315 and 31136(e), the FMCSA may grant an exemption for

a 2-year period if it finds "such exemption would likely achieve a level of safety that is equivalent to, or greater than, the level that would be achieved absent such exemption." The statute also allows the agency to renew exemptions at the end of the 2-year period. Accordingly, the FMCSA has evaluated the 29 applications on their merits and made a determination to grant exemptions to all of them. The comment period closed on December 8, 2004. Two comments were received, and their contents were carefully considered by the FMCSA in reaching the final decision to grant the exemptions.

Vision and Driving Experience of the Applicants

The vision requirement in the FMCSRs provides:

A person is physically qualified to drive a commercial motor vehicle if that person has distant visual acuity of at least 20/40 (Snellen) in each eye without corrective lenses or visual acuity separately corrected to 20/40 (Snellen) or better with corrective lenses, distant binocular acuity of at least 20/40 (Snellen) in both eyes with or without corrective lenses, field of vision of at least 70° in the horizontal meridian in each eye, and the ability to recognize the colors of traffic signals and devices showing standard red, green, and amber (49 CFR 391.41(b)(10)).

Since 1992, the agency has undertaken studies to determine if this vision standard should be amended. The final report from our medical panel recommends changing the field of vision standard from 70° to 120°, while leaving the visual acuity standard unchanged. (See Frank C. Berson, M.D., Mark C. Kuperwaser, M.D., Lloyd Paul Aiello, M.D., and James W. Rosenberg, M.D., Visual Requirements and Commercial Drivers, October 16, 1998, filed in the docket, FMCSA-98-4334.) The panel's conclusion supports the agency's view that the present visual acuity standard is reasonable and necessary as a general standard to ensure highway safety. The FMCSA also recognizes that some drivers do not meet the vision standard, but have adapted their driving to accommodate their vision limitation and demonstrated their ability to drive safely.

The 29 applicants fall into this category. They are unable to meet the vision standard in one eye for various reasons, including amblyopia, a macular scar, and loss of an eye due to trauma. In most cases, their eye conditions were not recently developed. All but 10 of the applicants were either born with their

vision impairments or have had them since childhood. The 10 individuals who sustained their vision conditions as adults have had them for periods ranging from 13 to 61 years.

Although each applicant has one eye which does not meet the vision standard in 49 CFR 391.41(b)(10), each has at least 20/40 corrected vision in the other eye, and in a doctor's opinion has sufficient vision to perform all the tasks necessary to operate a CMV. The doctors' opinions are supported by the applicants' possession of valid commercial driver's licenses (CDLs) or non-CDLs to operate CMVs. Before issuing CDLs, States subject drivers to knowledge and performance tests designed to evaluate their qualifications to operate a CMV. All these applicants satisfied the testing standards for their State of residence. By meeting State licensing requirements, the applicants demonstrated their ability to operate a commercial vehicle, with their limited vision, to the satisfaction of the State.

While possessing a valid CDL or non-CDL, these 29 drivers have been authorized to drive a CMV in intrastate commerce, even though their vision disqualifies them from driving in interstate commerce. They have driven CMVs with their limited vision for careers ranging from 4 to 44 years. In the past 3 years, six of the drivers have had convictions for traffic violations. Five of these convictions were for speeding and three were for "failure to obey traffic sign." Five drivers were involved in a crash but did not receive a citation.

The qualifications, experience, and medical condition of each applicant were stated and discussed in detail in the November 8, 2004, notice (69 FR 64806). Since there were no substantial docket comments on the specific merits or qualifications of any applicant, we have not repeated the individual profiles here. Our summary analysis of the applicants is supported by the information published on November 8, 2004 (69 FR 64806).

Basis for Exemption Determination

Under 49 U.S.C. 31315 and 31136(e), the FMCSA may grant an exemption from the vision standard in 49 CFR 391.41(b)(10) if the exemption is likely to achieve an equivalent or greater level of safety than would be achieved without the exemption. Without the exemption, applicants will continue to be restricted to intrastate driving. With the exemption, applicants can drive in interstate commerce. Thus, our analysis focuses on whether an equal or greater level of safety is likely to be achieved by permitting each of these drivers to drive in interstate commerce as opposed to

restricting him or her to driving in intrastate commerce.

To evaluate the effect of these exemptions on safety, the FMCSA considered not only the medical reports about the applicants' vision, but also their driving records and experience with the vision deficiency. To qualify for an exemption from the vision standard, the FMCSA requires a person to present verifiable evidence that he or she has driven a commercial vehicle safely with the vision deficiency for 3 years. Recent driving performance is especially important in evaluating future safety, according to several research studies designed to correlate past and future driving performance. Results of these studies support the principle that the best predictor of future performance by a driver is his/her past record of crashes and traffic violations. Copies of the studies may be found at docket number FMCSA-98-3637.

We believe we can properly apply the principle to monocular drivers, because data from a former FMCSA waiver study program clearly demonstrates that the driving performance of experienced monocular drivers in the program is better than that of all CMV drivers collectively. (See 61 FR 13338, 13345, March 26, 1996.) The fact that experienced monocular drivers with good driving records in the waiver program demonstrated their ability to drive safely supports a conclusion that other monocular drivers, meeting the same qualifying conditions as those required by the waiver program, are also likely to have adapted to their vision deficiency and will continue to operate safely.

The first major research correlating past and future performance was done in England by Greenwood and Yule in 1920. Subsequent studies, building on that model, concluded that crash rates for the same individual exposed to certain risks for two different time periods vary only slightly. (See Bates and Neyman, University of California Publications in Statistics, April 1952.) Other studies demonstrated theories of predicting crash proneness from crash history coupled with other factors. These factors—such as age, sex, geographic location, mileage driven and conviction history—are used every day by insurance companies and motor vehicle bureaus to predict the probability of an individual experiencing future crashes. (See Weber, Donald C., "Accident Rate Potential: An Application of Multiple Regression Analysis of a Poisson Process," Journal of American Statistical Association, June 1971.) A 1964 California Driver

Record Study prepared by the California Department of Motor Vehicles concluded that the best overall crash predictor for both concurrent and nonconcurrent events is the number of single convictions. This study used 3 consecutive years of data, comparing the experiences of drivers in the first 2 years with their experiences in the final year.

Applying principles from these studies to the past 3-year record of the 29 applicants receiving an exemption, we note that the applicants have had only five crashes and eight traffic violations in the last 3 years. The applicants achieved this record of safety while driving with their vision impairment, demonstrating the likelihood that they have adapted their driving skills to accommodate their condition. As the applicants' ample driving histories with their vision deficiencies are good predictors of future performance, the FMCSA concludes their ability to drive safely can be projected into the future.

We believe the applicants' intrastate driving experience and history provide an adequate basis for predicting their ability to drive safely in interstate commerce. Intrastate driving, like interstate operations, involves substantial driving on highways on the interstate system and on other roads built to interstate standards. Moreover, driving in congested urban areas exposes the driver to more pedestrian and vehicular traffic than exists on interstate highways. Faster reaction to traffic and traffic signals is generally required because distances between them are more compact. These conditions tax visual capacity and driver response just as intensely as interstate driving conditions. The veteran drivers in this proceeding have operated CMVs safely under those conditions for at least 3 years, most for much longer. Their experience and driving records lead us to believe that each applicant is capable of operating in interstate commerce as safely as he or she has been performing in intrastate commerce. Consequently, the FMCSA finds that exempting these applicants from the vision standard in 49 CFR 391.41(b)(10) is likely to achieve a level of safety equal to that existing without the exemption. For this reason, the agency is granting the exemptions for the 2-year period allowed by 49 U.S.C. 31315 and 31336(e) to the 29 applicants listed in the notice of November 8, 2004 (69 FR 64806).

We recognize that the vision of an applicant may change and affect his/her ability to operate a commercial vehicle as safely as in the past. As a condition of the exemption, therefore, the FMCSA

will impose requirements on the 29 individuals consistent with the grandfathering provisions applied to drivers who participated in the agency's vision waiver program.

Those requirements are found at 49 CFR 391.64(b) and include the following: (1) That each individual be physically examined every year (a) by an ophthalmologist or optometrist who attests that the vision in the better eye continues to meet the standard in 49 CFR 391.41(b)(10), and (b) by a medical examiner who attests that the individual is otherwise physically qualified under 49 CFR 391.41; (2) that each individual provide a copy of the ophthalmologist's or optometrist's report to the medical examiner at the time of the annual medical examination; and (3) that each individual provide a copy of the annual medical certification to the employer for retention in the driver's qualification file, or keep a copy in his/her driver's qualification file if he/she is self-employed. The driver must also have a copy of the certification when driving, for presentation to a duly authorized Federal, State, or local enforcement official.

Discussion of Comments

The FMCSA received two comments in this proceeding. The comments were considered and are discussed below.

Ms. Barb Sashaw believes the qualifications presented for each applicant should include an ophthalmologist's statement on an FMCSA-mandated form that would include all elements that would make the vision in the better eye sufficient for driving. Also, she objected to the wording of an opinion by the optometrist regarding Applicant #8. Finally, Ms. Sashaw does not think it safe in general for monocular drivers to be allowed to operate a CMV in highly congested States, such as New Jersey, New York, Connecticut and California.

In regard to the first issue, the FMCSA believes it can rely on the medical opinions of vision specialists on whether a driver has sufficient vision to perform the tasks associated with operating a CMV, since the specialists express these opinions only after a thorough vision examination, including formal field of vision testing to identify any medical condition which may compromise the visual field, such as glaucoma, stroke or brain tumor.

In the case of Applicant #8, the optometrist stated, "I feel he has sufficient vision to perform the driving tasks required to operate a commercial vehicle." Ms. Sashaw believes the use of the word "feel" makes the statement insufficient. In the context of the

requirements for statements of medical specialists described above, the FMCSA believes the optometrist expressed her medical opinion, and it can rely on that opinion regarding whether the driver's visual capacity is sufficient to enable safe operations.

In regard to the third issue, the discussion above under the heading, "Basis for Exemption Determination," explains why FMCSA believes the monocular drivers included in this notice have demonstrated their ability to drive safely in conditions similar to interstate driving by operating in intrastate commerce for 3 years prior to their applications.

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates) expresses continued opposition to the FMCSA's policy to grant exemptions from the FMCSRs, including the driver qualification standards. Specifically, Advocates: (1) Objects to the manner in which the FMCSA presents driver information to the public and makes safety determinations; (2) objects to the agency's reliance on conclusions drawn from the vision waiver program; (3) claims the agency has misinterpreted statutory language on the granting of exemptions (49 U.S.C. 31315 and 31136(e)); and finally (4) suggests that a 1999 Supreme Court decision affects the legal validity of vision exemptions.

The issues raised by Advocates were addressed at length in 64 FR 51568 (September 23, 1999), 64 FR 66962 (November 30, 1999), 64 FR 69586 (December 13, 1999), 65 FR 159 (January 3, 2000), 65 FR 57230 (September 21, 2000), and 66 FR 13825 (March 7, 2001). We will not address these points again here, but refer interested parties to those earlier discussions.

Conclusion

Based upon its evaluation of the 29 exemption applications, the FMCSA exempts Leonida R. Batista, Johnny Becerra, Larry W. Burnett, Ross E. Burroughs, Roger C. Carson, Lester W. Carter, Larry Chinn, Christopher L. DePuy, John B. Ethridge, Larry J. Folkerts, Randolph D. Hall, Richard T. Hatchel, Paul W. Hunter, Harold D. Jones, Lester G. Kelley II, Robert L. Lafollette, Ray P. Lenz, John M. Lonergan, Michael B. McClure, Lamont S. McCord, Francis M. McMullin, Joe L. Meredith, Jr., Norman Mullins, Harold W. Mumford, Charles R. O'Connell, Dennis R. O'Dell, Jr., Virgil A. Potts, Clarence H. Redding, and David J. Triplett from the vision requirement in 49 CFR 391.41(b)(10), subject to the requirements cited above (49 CFR 391.64(b)).

In accordance with 49 U.S.C. 31315 and 31136(e), each exemption will be valid for 2 years unless revoked earlier by the FMCSA. The exemption will be revoked if: (1) The person fails to comply with the terms and conditions of the exemption; (2) the exemption has resulted in a lower level of safety than was maintained before it was granted; or (3) continuation of the exemption would not be consistent with the goals and objectives of 49 U.S.C. 31315 and 31136. If the exemption is still effective at the end of the 2-year period, the person may apply to the FMCSA for a renewal under procedures in effect at that time.

Issued on: January 10, 2005.

Rose A. McMurray,

Associate Administrator, Policy and Program Development.

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

[Docket No. NHTSA-2004-19996; Notice 1]

Dynamic Tire Corp., Receipt of Petition for Decision of Inconsequential Noncompliance

Dynamic Tire Corp. (Dynamic Tire) has determined that certain tires it imported and which were manufactured by Tianjin Wanda Tyre Group Co., LTD do not comply with S6.5(b) of Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS) No. 119, "New pneumatic tires for vehicles other than passenger cars." Dynamic Tire has filed an appropriate report pursuant to 49 CFR Part 573, "Defect and Noncompliance Reports."

Pursuant to 49 U.S.C. 30118(d) and 30120(h), Dynamic Tire has petitioned for an exemption from the notification and remedy requirements of 49 U.S.C. Chapter 301 on the basis that this noncompliance is inconsequential to motor vehicle safety.

This notice of receipt of Dynamic Tire's petition is published under 49 U.S.C. 30118 and 30120 and does not represent any agency decision or other exercise of judgment concerning the merits of the petition.

A total of approximately 67,864 tires produced between August 1, 2004 to December 4, 2004 are affected. S6.5(b) of FMVSS No. 119 requires that each tire shall be marked on each sidewall with "the tire identification number required by part 574 of this chapter." Part 574.5(d) requires the date code to be listed such that the first two symbols must identify the week of the year and

third and fourth symbols must identify the year. The noncompliant tires reversed the order of these symbols.

Dynamic Tire believes that the noncompliance is inconsequential to motor vehicle safety and that no corrective action is warranted. Dynamic Tire states that "the production week * * * begins with the 31st week of 2004 which eliminates any possibility of confusion between week and year designation." Dynamic Tire further states that the tires comply with all other requirements of the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards.

Interested persons are invited to submit written data, views, and arguments on the petition described above. Comments must refer to the docket and notice number cited at the beginning of this notice and be submitted by any of the following methods. Mail: Docket Management Facility, U.S. Department of Transportation, Nasif Building, Room PL-401, 400 Seventh Street, SW., Washington, DC 20590-0001. Hand Delivery: Room PL-401 on the plaza level of the Nasif Building, 400 Seventh Street, SW., Washington, DC. It is requested, but not required, that two copies of the comments be provided. The Docket Section is open on weekdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. except Federal Holidays. Comments may be submitted electronically by logging onto the Docket Management System Web site at <http://dms.dot.gov>. Click on "Help" to obtain instructions for filing the document electronically. Comments may be faxed to 1-202-493-2251, or may be submitted to the Federal eRulemaking Portal: go to <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the online instructions for submitting comments.

The petition, supporting materials, and all comments received before the close of business on the closing date indicated below will be filed and will be considered. All comments and supporting materials received after the closing date will also be filed and will be considered to the extent possible. When the petition is granted or denied, notice of the decision will be published in the **Federal Register** pursuant to the authority indicated below.

Comment closing date: February 14, 2005.

Authority: 49 U.S.C. 30118, 30120; delegations of authority at CFR 1.50 and 501.8.

Issued on: January 10, 2005.

Claude H. Harris,

Director, Office of Vehicle Safety Compliance.

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