



Vehicle inspections are required at several points: pre- and post-trip, a 50-mile cargo/load securement check and a 150-mile or three-hour walk around. Trainees are also instructed to watch gauges, look, and listen for signs of trouble and notice if the vehicle's handling changes. (Photo courtesy of Virginia Tech Transportation Institute)

## Free CDL training for equipment operators

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**G**ood help is hard to find—especially in today's tight job market. So, for many public works agencies, it's common practice to hire good candidates and then train them on the job—including preparing new employees to obtain a commercial driver's license (CDL).

But this year, new federal requirements for entry-level driver training (ELDT) have forced many agencies to rethink the way they teach new hires to operate dump trucks, snowplows, and other heavy-duty vehicles. To prepare workers to obtain or upgrade a CDL, training providers at each agency must now be listed on a national registry and must follow a comprehensive federally mandated training curriculum of classroom and behind-the-wheel instruction.

"Prior to the new rule, every agency developed its own training program and decided which topics to include," says Scott Lucas, an assistant administrator with the Ohio Department of Transportation (DOT) Office of Maintenance Operations. "Now, we need to cover specific topics in the classroom, on the driving course and on the roadway."

This can be a major undertaking. As part of an effort to improve truck safety across the country, in February the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) implemented extensive training requirements for CDL applicants. For many public works agencies, developing an in-house training program that complies with these requirements isn't feasible. But the alternative—sending employees to private driver training schools—can be prohibitively expensive, and training schools are not available in all areas.

With thousands of agencies facing the same challenges, Lucas and his counterparts at DOTs across the nation saw an opportunity for states to work together for a solution. As members of the Clear Roads winter maintenance research consortium ([www.clearroads.org](http://www.clearroads.org)), Lucas and Indiana DOT Statewide Winter Operations Manager Jeremy McGuffey led an effort to develop free CDL training materials for equipment operators that any agency can use and customize.

"In the past, CDL training at Indiana DOT was primarily done at our local garages, with experienced drivers using varied methods to work with applicants," McGuffey

explains. “Through Clear Roads, we saw an opportunity to create a standardized CDL training program that could be widely shared.”

As part of the federal Transportation Pooled Fund program, Clear Roads leverages annual contributions from 36-member state DOTs to fund research projects that address common needs. With the new CDL training rule on the horizon, the members agreed that providing access to high-quality, FMCSA-compliant CDL training materials would greatly benefit state and local agencies in all 50 states.

To create the materials, Clear Roads tapped a team of experts from Virginia Tech Transportation Institute. The team had extensive experience with developing driver training programs, including previous research that helped inform the development of the new FMCSA regulations.

The result was a comprehensive, step-by-step CDL training program designed specifically for heavy equipment operators. So that all agencies could benefit from this resource, Clear Roads members decided to make the program freely available to anyone who requests it.

The response has been enthusiastic. “The Clear Roads curriculum has been an invaluable resource for us,” says Jeremy Faust, senior safety administrator with the St. Louis County (Missouri) Department of Transportation and Public Works. “It has allowed us to continue training our own drivers without spending months developing our own program from scratch or needing to turn to external training providers.

“The Clear Roads materials have undoubtedly saved us a lot of time and money,” Faust adds.

### **A curriculum that covers it all**

The Clear Roads program, “Entry-Level Driver Training for Maintenance Equipment Operators,” is a comprehensive package of driver training materials, train-the-trainer resources, and process guidance to help transportation agencies comply with the requirements of the federal ELDT rule. The classroom (theory) training is provided in two formats: PowerPoint™ presentations for instructor-led courses and eLearning files for use with a learning management system.

The training curriculum is designed for drivers who are seeking to obtain an initial Class B CDL, upgrade from a Class B CDL to a Class A CDL, or obtain the hazardous materials endorsement for the first time. Following the federal requirements, the classroom training materials cover 30 topics in five areas:

- **Basic operations.** Trainees start with a truck’s control systems and basic maneuvers such as shifting or operating transmissions.

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- **Safety.** Speed management, visual impairments and distracted driving are covered. Trainees also learn about driving trucks at night and in extreme conditions.
- **Advanced practices.** Issues that a CDL driver might encounter include railroad crossings, jackknifing and other hazards and emergencies.
- **Truck systems and malfunctions.** Drivers need to be able to identify and diagnose malfunctions and understand basic maintenance.
- **Nondriving activities.** Safe and efficient operation of a truck requires handling cargo, fatigue awareness and post-crash procedures.

Outside, trainees get behind the wheel to work on 19 different skill sets on a practice course and public roads. The curriculum includes skills such as parking, entering and exiting a highway, and skid control. Students must pass the classroom exams and the road tests with at least an 80% proficiency level.

For instructors, the program's train-the-trainer materials include instructional strategies, unit outlines and exam materials. A fact sheet is provided to help guide agencies through the process of becoming a certified training provider, signing up with the federal training provider registry, and entering new drivers into the system.

### An unqualified hit

Demand for the Clear Roads training materials has exceeded expectations, with the group receiving more than 500 requests from a range of organizations in the first several months. The materials have been downloaded by state and local transportation and public works agencies, fire and emergency departments, airport authorities, school districts, private driving schools, and members of the public.

"Agencies are telling us that the Clear Roads ELDT training is making a huge difference for them," says Clear Roads administrator Greg Waidley. "It really meets a critical need at just the right time."

The Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) is one of those agencies. "We were struggling with the new regulations at first, but the Clear Roads materials helped explain the entirety of the process and provided clarity," says Amanda Regnier, ITD's Learning and Development Program Supervisor. "We were very pleased with the curriculums that Clear Roads put together. They helped us build our CDL training program more quickly and efficiently."

Agencies have appreciated the ability to modify the Clear Roads training materials to fit their needs. In Idaho, says Regnier, "We updated the presentations to include ITD pictures and policy, programs, and safety updates. We didn't make any changes to the content, except to ensure it was specific to ITD and Idaho."



Instructors guide trainees through various parking and backing exercises in a parking lot or other training course before heading out on the roads for additional skills testing. (Photo courtesy of Indiana Department of Transportation)

The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) was also able to pick and choose elements from the Clear Roads materials to enhance its own training program. "We've voiced over and uploaded all of the Clear Roads classroom training to our learning management system for a self-paced learning experience," says Sara Williams, technical branch manager with the VTrans Training Center. "We made refinements to the behind-the-wheel training materials and tracking sheets and provided each trainer with the resources to establish a binder for each trainee they work with. This approach worked best to meet the needs of our trainers and trainees for real-world, in the field use."

Entities large and small, public and private, agree that the training materials are an invaluable and timely resource. "We were extremely grateful to be able to use the Clear Roads training materials," says Kimberly Glover, a manager with Atchison County Road and Bridge Office in Kansas. "It got us moving in the right direction."

The free training materials discussed in this article can be accessed through the Clear Roads website at [www.clearroads.org/request-for-eldt-training-modules-form](http://www.clearroads.org/request-for-eldt-training-modules-form).

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