III. OVERVIEW OF SPECIFIC SAFETY REGULATIONS, AVAILABLE INFORMATION, WEBSITES

A. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS AND DEFINITIONS

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSR) apply to all employers, employees, and commercial motor vehicles transporting property or passengers in interstate commerce, including "for-hire" carriers, "private" carriers and "exempt" motor carriers. With few exceptions, the federal regulations apply to all commercial motor vehicles ("CMV's") in interstate commerce.

49 C.F.R. §390 *et. seq.* sets forth in detail the purpose and applicability of many of the regulations relating to commercial motor vehicles that transport property or passengers in interstate commerce. Part 390 also supplies, among other things, definitions, rules of construction, and the safety regulations' effect on state and local laws and vehicle marking.

Of particular interest to the lawyer is 49 C.F.R. §390.9, which addresses the issue of preemption. §390.9 specifically provides that the federal motor vehicle safety regulations are not intended to preclude or pre-empt state or local laws relating to safety. Thus, the federal regulations, state laws, and local ordinances are all available to the lawyer to establish violations as negligence as a matter of law, or negligence *per se*.

² See 49 C.F.R. §390.5 for definitions.

¹ 49 C.F.R. §390.3(a).

B. CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES AND ALCOHOLUSE AND TESTING

49 C.F.R. Part 382 sets forth very detailed regulations related to controlled substance and alcohol use and testing "designed to help prevent accidents and injuries resulting from the misuse of alcohol or use of controlled substances by drivers of commercial motor vehicles".³ The regulations apply to every person and to all employers of such persons who operate a commercial motor vehicle in commerce in any state, and is subject to the commercial driver's license requirements of 49 C.F.R. §383 *et. seq.*, with a few exceptions.⁴ In fact, there is a specific preemption of all state and local laws to the extent that compliance with both the state/local requirement and part 382 is not possible or is an obstacle to the execution of any requirement in part 382.⁵

Results from the most recent published data (8/13/00) from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's Data Analysis Division are positive and encouraging from years past. In 1999, only 1.3% of truckers tested positive for drugs on random testing, down from 1.5% the year before. In 1999, only 0.5% of truckers tested positive with blood alcohol levels of .02% or higher on random testing. The estimated violation rate (BAC of .04% or higher) based on random testing in 1999 was .2%. The 1999 survey also estimated that 67% of the motor

³ 49 C.F.R. §382.101.

⁴ 49 C.F.R. §382.103.

⁵ 49 C.F.R. §382.109.

carriers had random drug testing in place, and that 94% of all CDL drivers participated in random testing programs, indicating that larger trucking companies participate regularly in such programs.

The FMCSR require carriers to perform drug and alcohol testing (nonrandom) on CDL drivers when (1) the driver is being considered for employment⁶ (only for drugs and only when the driver has not recently been in a drug and alcohol testing program); (2) the driver has been involved in a crash⁷ (only when the crash involves a fatality, or when the driver receives a citation in a tow away or injury related crash); or (3) the driver is suspected by a supervisor of using drugs or alcohol while at work.⁸ In addition, carriers must randomly test 10 percent of their CDL drivers for alcohol and 50 percent of their CDL drivers for drugs.⁹

In the case of alcohol, an on-duty CDL driver is in violation of FMCSR when his/her blood alcohol content is equal to .04 or greater.¹⁰ The alcohol violation rate for the industry (published annually by the FMCSA and used to evaluate required motor carrier testing rates) is based on the .04 cutoff level. For drugs (marijuana, cocaine, opiates, amphetamines, and PCP), the cutoff

⁶ 49 C.F.R. §382.301.

⁷ 49 C.F.R. §382.303.

⁸ 49 C.F.R. §382.307.

⁹ 49 C.F.R. §382.305.

¹⁰ 49 C.F.R. §382.201.

levels for identifying use are based on guidelines set by the Department of Health and Human Services.

Certain offenses related to drugs and alcohol will disqualify a driver for at least one year pursuant 49 C.F.R. §391.15(c)(2). The rule sets forth the following as disqualifying offenses:

(i) Driving a commercial motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol. This shall include: (A) Driving a commercial motor vehicle while the person's alcohol concentration is 0.04 percent or more; (B) Driving under the influence of alcohol, as prescribed by State law; or (C) Refusal to undergo such testing as is required by any State or jurisdiction in the enforcement of 391.15(c)(2)(i) (A) or (B), or 392.5(a)(2). (ii) Driving a commercial motor vehicle under the influence of a 21 CFR 1308.11 Schedule I identified controlled substance, an amphetamine, a narcotic drug, a formulation of an amphetamine, or a derivative of a narcotic drug; (iii) Transportation, possession, or unlawful use of a 21 CFR 1308.11 Schedule I identified controlled substance, amphetamines, narcotic drugs, formulations of an amphetamine, or derivatives of narcotic drugs while the driver is on duty, as the term on-duty time is defined in 395.2 of this subchapter; (iv) Leaving the scene of an accident while operating a commercial motor vehicle; or (v) A felony involving the use of a commercial motor vehicle.

An excellent overview of the alcohol and drug rules with questions and answers can be found at

www.fmsca.dot.gov/safetyprogs/drugs/engtesting.htm.

If there is any indication that the driver was under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs at the time of the wreck, it is important to follow up with the investigating officer and/or the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) as soon as possible. It has been our experience with regard to the drug

methamphetamine (a favorite of some truckers) that the GBI does not regularly perform confirmatory analysis to differentiate between the different isomers of methamphetamine (one legal and the other illegal). We suggest you confirm that the GBI forensic laboratory will maintain the samples, so that at a later date you can have them tested by an independent lab, if necessary.

B. COMMERCIAL DRIVER'S LICENSE (CDL) STANDARDS, REQUIREMENTS & PENALTIES

It is widely recognized that driving certain commercial motor vehicles (CMVs) requires special skills and knowledge. Prior to implementation of the Commercial Driver's License (CDL) Program in 1986, in a number of states and the District of Columbia, any person licensed to drive an automobile could also legally drive a tractor-trailer or a bus. Even in many of the states that did have a classified licensing system, a person was not skills-tested in a representative vehicle. As a result, many drivers were operating motor vehicles that they may not have been qualified to drive. In addition, many drivers were able to obtain driver's licenses from more than one state and hide or spread convictions among several driving records and continue to drive.

1. Commercial Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1986

The Commercial Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1986 was signed into law on October 27, 1986. The goal of the Act was to improve highway safety by

ensuring that drivers of large trucks and buses were qualified to operate those vehicles and to remove unsafe and unqualified drivers from the highways. The Act retained the state's right to issue a driver's license, but established minimum national standards which states must meet when licensing CMV drivers.

The Act corrected the situation existing before 1986 by making it illegal to hold more than one license and by requiring states to adopt testing and licensing standards for truck and bus drivers to check a person's ability to operate the type of vehicle he/she planned to operate.

The Act did not require drivers to obtain a separate Federal license; it merely required states to upgrade their existing testing and licensing programs, if necessary, to conform with the federal minimum standards.

The CDL program places requirements on the CMV driver, the employing motor carrier and the states.

a. The Driver

Drivers have been required to have a CDL in order to drive a CMV since April 1, 1992. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has developed and issued standards for testing and licensing CMV drivers. Among other things, the standards require states to issue CDLs to their CMV drivers only after the driver passes knowledge and skills tests administered by the state and related to the type of vehicle to be operated.

Drivers need CDLs if they are in interstate, intrastate, or foreign commerce and drive a vehicle that meets one of the following definitions of a CMV:

- Classes of License: The federal standard requires states to issue a CDL to drivers according to the following license classifications:
- Class A -- Any combination of vehicles with a GVWR of 26,001 or more pounds provided the GVWR of the vehicle(s) being towed is in excess of 10,000 pounds.
- Class B -- Any single vehicle with a GVWR of 26,001 or more pounds, or any such vehicle towing a vehicle not in excess of 10,000 pounds GVWR.
- Class C -- Any single vehicle, or combination of vehicles, that does not meet the definition of Class A or Class B, but is either designed to transport 16 or more passengers, including the driver, or is placarded for hazardous materials.
- ii. Endorsements and Restrictions: Drivers who operate special types of CMVs also need to pass additional tests to obtain any of the following endorsements on their CDL:
- T Double/Triple Trailers (Knowledge test only)
- P Passenger (Knowledge and Skills Tests)
- N Tank Vehicle (Knowledge Test only)
- H Hazardous Materials (Knowledge Test only)
- X Combination of Tank Vehicle and Hazardous Materials

If a driver either fails the air brake component of the general knowledge test or performs the skills test in a vehicle not equipped with air brakes, the driver is issued an air brake restriction, restricting the driver from operating a CMV equipped with air brakes.

b. The States

- i. Knowledge & Skills Tests: States develop their own tests which must be <u>at least</u> as stringent as the Federal standards. Model driver and examiner manuals and tests have been prepared and distributed to the States to use, if they wish.
 - The general knowledge test must contain at least 30 questions.
 - To pass the knowledge tests (general and endorsement), applicants must correctly answer at least 80 percent of the questions.
 - To pass the skills test, applicants must successfully perform all the required skills (listed in 49 CFR 383.113).
 - The skills test must be taken in a vehicle representative of the type of vehicle that the applicant operates or expects to operate.
- ii. Third Party Skills Testing: Other states, employers, training facilities, governmental departments and agencies, and private institutions can serve as third party skills testers for the State.
 - Tests must be the same as those given by the state.
 - Examiners must meet same qualifications as state examiners.
 - States must conduct an on-site inspection at least once a year.
 - At least annually, state employees must evaluate the programs by taking third party tests as if they were test applicants, or by testing a sample of drivers tested by the third party and then comparing pass/fail rates.
 - The state's agreement with the third party skills tester must allow the FHWA and the state to conduct random examinations, inspections, and audits without prior notice.
- iii. Commercial Driver's License Document: A state determines the license fee, the license renewal cycle, most renewal procedures, and continues to decide the age, medical and other driver qualifications of its intrastate

commercial drivers. Interstate drivers must meet the longstanding Federal driver qualifications (49 CFR 391).

- All CDLs must contain the following information: The words "Commercial Driver's License" or "CDL;"
- The driver's full name, signature, and address, date of birth, sex, and height;
- Color photograph or digitized image of the driver;
- The driver's state license number;
- The name of the issuing state;
- The date of issuance and the date of the expiration of the license:
- The class(es) of vehicle that the driver is authorized to drive;
- Notation of the "air brake" restriction, if issued;
- The endorsement(s) for which the driver has qualified;

iv. Waiver Provisions:

- All active duty military drivers were waived from the CDL requirements by the Federal Highway Administrator.
- A state, at its discretion, may waive firefighters, emergency response vehicle drivers, farmers and drivers removing snow and ice in small communities from the CDL requirements, subject to certain conditions.
- A state may also waive the CDL knowledge and skills testing requirements for seasonal drivers in farm-related service industries and waive certain knowledge and skills testing requirements for drivers in remote areas of Alaska. The drivers are issued restricted CDLs.
- A state can also waive the CDL hazardous materials endorsement test requirements for part-time drivers working for the pyrotechnics industry, subject to certain conditions.

c. Penalties

The Federal penalty to a driver who violates the CDL requirements is a

civil penalty of up to \$2,500 or, in aggravated cases, criminal penalties of up to \$5,000 in fines and/or up to 90 days in prison. An employer is also subject to a penalty of up to \$10,000, if he or she knowingly uses a driver to operate a CMV without a valid CDL.

d. Other Miscellaneous Goodies

CDLIS Clearinghouse: States must be connected to the Commercial Driver's License Information System ("CDLIS") and the National Driver Register ("NDR") to exchange information about CMV drivers and traffic convictions and disqualifications. A state must use both the CDLIS and NDR to check a driver's record and the CDLIS to make certain that the applicant does not already have a CDL. Employing motor carriers also have access to the CDLIS.

BAC Standards: The FHWA has also established 0.04% as the blood alcohol concentration ("BAC") level at or above which a CMV driver is deemed to be driving under the influence of alcohol and subject to the disqualification sanctions in the Act. States maintain a BAC level between .08% and .10% for non-CMV drivers.

Employer Notifications: Within 30 days of a conviction for any traffic violation except parking, a driver must notify his/her employer, regardless of the nature of the violation or the type of vehicle which was driven at the time. If a driver's license is suspended, revoked, canceled, or if he/she is disqualified from driving, his/her employer must be notified. The notification must be made by the

end of the next business day following receipt of the notice of the suspension, revocation, cancellation, lost privilege or disqualification. Employers may not knowingly use a driver who has more than one license or whose license is suspended, revoked or canceled, or is disqualified from driving. Violation of this requirement may result in civil or criminal penalties.

Over 8 millions drivers have passed the knowledge and skills tests and obtained a CDL. Approximately 11 percent of these CDL drivers have been disqualified at least once during the period of April 1992 through June 1996.

C. QUALIFICATION OF DRIVERS

49 C.F.R. §391 addresses both qualification and disqualification of drivers. Information gathering and reporting requirements are placed on the motor carrier as well. For the lawyer, Part 391 provides fertile ground for negligent hiring, entrustment and retention claims.

The rules in Part 391 establish *minimum* qualifications for persons who drive CMV's as, for, or on behalf of motor carriers.¹¹

The qualifications needed to drive a CMV include the following: (1) . . . 21 years old; (2) can read and speak English language sufficiently . . .; (3) can . . . safely operate the type of CMV he/she drives; (4) is physically qualified to drive . . .; (5) has . . . valid CDL; (6) has prepared and furnished the motor carrier with the list of violations . . . as required by §391.27; (7) is not disqualified . . . (8) has

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¹¹ 49 C.F.R. §391.1.

successfully completed a driver's road test . . . or has presented an operator's license ¹²

Subpart C of Part 391 requires that an application for employment be completed and furnished to the motor carrier before a person shall drive. Each application must be completed and signed by the applicant containing, among other things, the driver's experience; a list of motor vehicle accidents in last three (3) years; a list of all moving violations; information regarding license suspensions and/or revocations; and a list of employers for the past three (3) years, etc.¹³

The employing motor carrier must also make certain investigations and inquiries with respect to each driver that it employs. The inquiry includes the applicant's driving record for the preceding three (3) years and his/her employment record for the preceding three (3) years.¹⁴ The employer is also required to make inquiry, at least every 12 months, into the driving record of each driver it employs¹⁵ and shall review it to determine whether that driver meets minimum requirements for safe driving or is disqualified to drive.¹⁶ The motor carrier must consider the driver's accident record and any evidence that the driver

¹² 49 C.F.R. §391.11.

¹³ 49 C.F.R. §391.21.

¹⁴ 49 C.F.R. §391.23.

^{15 49} C.F.R. §391.25(a).

¹⁶ 49 C.F.R. §391.25(b).

has violated laws governing the operation of motor vehicles, and must give great weight to violations such as speeding, reckless driving and operating under the influence of alcohol or drugs.¹⁷

It is important to note that these represent the *minimum* requirements that must be complied with and they do not necessarily suggest that an employer acted in a reasonable manner in the hiring and retention of those in its employ.

D. HOURS OF SERVICE OF DRIVERS AND DRIVER FATIGUE

49 C.F.R. §395 contains very detailed limits on the time that a driver can actually be engaged in operating a CMV and applies to all motor carriers and drivers.

In April 2003, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration

("FMSCA") issued the first significant revision of the Hours of Service ("HOS")

regulations in over 60 years. The new HOS rules will not be enforced until

January 4, 2004. The revised HOS regulations can be found at

www.fmsca.dot.gov/Home_Files/revised_hos.asp. The new HOS regulations

will, among other things, allow drivers of property to spend up to eleven (11)

straight hours behind the wheel, a one (1) hour increase from the current level, but

truckers would be required to take off at least ten (10) hours between shifts, two

(2) hours more than now required.

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¹⁷ 49 C.F.R. §391.25(b)(2).

Until January 4, 2004, no motor carrier shall permit or require any driver used by it to drive more than 10 hours following 8 consecutive hours off-duty; or for any period after having been on-duty 15 hours following 8 consecutive hours off-duty. In addition, no motor carrier shall permit or require a driver to drive for any period after having been on-duty 60 hours in any 7 consecutive days if the carrier does not operate every day of the week; or having been on-duty 70 hours in any period of 8 consecutive days if the carrier operates every day. The log measures "off-duty" time, "sleeper berth" time, "on-duty driving" time and "on-duty non-driving" time. A log must be completed for each twenty-four hour period and is considered current if it is completed up to the last "change of status." Drivers are to maintain each record of duty status for the previous 7 consecutive days and carriers are required to retain driver's logs for 6 months, along with all supporting documents. 20

A 1986 survey revealed that more than 63% of long-haul drivers surveyed admitted to committing regular violations of the maximum hours of service regulations.²¹ A 1990 safety study examining the cause of 182 accidents that were fatal to drivers of heavy trucks found that 31% of fatalities in the sample

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¹⁸ 49 C.F.R. §395.3(a)(1) & (2).

¹⁹ 49 C.F.R. §395.3(b)(1) & (2).

²⁰ 49 C.F.R. §395.8(k).

²¹ Regular, Common Conference, 1986 Motor Carrier Safety Survey.

involved truck driver fatigue.²² A 1995 study of 107 accidents (62 of which were fatigue-related) examined the factors that affect fatigue in heavy truck accidents. Results of the study showed the three most critical factors that predicted a fatigue-related accident were duration of sleep in the last sleep period, the total hours of sleep obtained during the 24 hours prior to the accident, and the presence of split sleep periods.²³ In fact, the risk of local/short haul truck involvement in fatigue-related fatal crashes is a fraction of that of over-the-road trucks.²⁴ A wealth of information on this topic, including studies, projects, rule-making proposals, safety recommendations to the industry, Administration and Congress, focus groups and data are available at the FMCSA's website www.fmcsa.dot.gov.

E. PARTS AND ACCESSORIES NECESSARY FOR SAFE OPERATIONS

49 C.F.R. § 393 contains very detailed requirements concerning lighting, retro reflective sheeting, signaling, wiring specifications, brake systems, windows, fuel systems, coupling devices, tires, frames, emergency equipment, securement systems, etc. The requirements of Part 393 range in complexity from very simple

²² National Transportation Safety Board. 1990. *Fatigue, Alcohol, Other Drugs, and Medical Factors in Fatal-to-the-Driver Heavy Truck Crashes*. Safety Study NTSB/SS-90/01 and NTSB/SS-90/02. Washington, DC.

²³ National Transportation Safety Board. 1995. *Factors That Affect Fatigue in Heavy Truck Accidents*. Safety Study NTSB/SS-95/01 and NTSB/SS-95/02. Washington, DC.

²⁴ Short Haul Trucks and Driver Fatigue. FHWA-MC-98-016, NTIS PB98-127129.

requirements that even a lawyer could understand to very technical requirements that will require working in conjunction with an expert.

For the lawyer in equipment failure cases, it is necessary to understand what component failed, how the component should have operated, and how the component failed.

Two relatively new requirements are worth special note. On March 31, 1999, 49 C.F.R. §393.13 went into effect. 49 C.F.R. §393.13 requires that all trailers and semitrailers manufactured prior to December 1, 1993 must be equipped with retro reflective sheeting or an array of reflex reflectors that meet the requirements of Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard No. 108 ("FMVSS") (49 C.F.R.§571.108). Motor carriers had until June 1, 2001 to comply with the requirements of this section.

On September 1, 1999, 49 C.F.R. §393.86 was amended to add a requirement that each trailer and semitrailer manufactured on or after January 26, 1998 must be equipped with a rear impact guard that meets the requirements of FMVSS No. 223 (49 C.F.R. §571.223) in effect at the time the vehicle was manufactured. In addition, when the rear impact guard is installed on the trailer or semitrailer, the vehicle must, at a minimum, meet the requirements of FMVSS No. 224 (49 C.F.R. §571.224). FMVSS Nos. 223 and 224 set forth very specific requirements as to guard height, width, strength and energy absorption, in addition to installation instructions and testing and labeling specifications.

For all other trailers and semitrailers manufactured before January 26,

1998, the regulations are still quite vague as to what constitutes adequate rear end protection, as the only requirement is that "the rear impact guard(s) must be substantially constructed and attached by means of bolts, welding, or other comparable means". The precise meaning of "substantially constructed and attached" still remains a mystery, but FMVSS Nos. 223 and 224 shed light on the issue of reasonable care for a motor carrier and for the trailer manufacturers.

F. INSPECTION, REPAIR & MAINTENANCE; OUT OF SERVICE CRITERIA

49 C.F.R. §396 concerns the systematic inspection, repair, and maintenance of the CMV. Part 396 applies to every motor carrier, its officers, agents, representatives, and employees directly concerned with the maintenance of motor vehicles.²⁵ Every motor carrier is required to *systematically* inspect, repair, and maintain all motor vehicles subject to its control.²⁶ Repair and maintenance records are required to be kept by the carrier for a period of 1 year and for 6 months after the motor vehicle leaves the motor carrier's control.²⁷

The driver of any motor vehicle receiving an inspection report shall deliver it to the motor carrier operating the vehicle. Motor carriers are required to examine the report, correct the violations and defects noted, certify that all

²⁶ 49 C.F.R. §396.3.

²⁵ 49 C.F.R. §396.1.

²⁷ 49 C.F.R. §396.3(c).

violations noted have been corrected, and return the completed roadside inspection form to the issuing agency.²⁸

There is a daily reporting requirement which requires drivers to report on a daily basis at the completion of each day's work, the condition of brakes, steering, lighting, tires, and other equipment.²⁹ The operator then has a duty to correct the equipment problem prior to the vehicle being operated again. Drivers are also required to complete an inspection each time before driving and be satisfied that the motor vehicle is in safe operating condition.³⁰

Motor carriers are required to perform periodic inspections by a qualified inspector³¹ at least once during the past 12 months.³²

Without question, if an equipment failure is involved the regulations in Part 396 can be very valuable to the attorney in the prosecution of the case.

F. DRIVING OF COMMERCIAL MOTOR VEHICLES

49 C.F.R. §392 provides a list of operating rules for the CMV and applies to every motor carrier, its officers, agents, representatives, and employees

²⁸ 49 C.F.R. §396.9(d)(1), (2), (3).

²⁹ 49 C.F.R. §396.11.

³⁰ 49 C.F.R. §396.13.

³¹ See 49 C.F.R. §396.19.

³² 49 C.F.R. §396.17.

responsible for the management, maintenance, operation or driving of CMV's.³³

If a regulation of the FHWA imposes a higher standard of care than a state or local law, the FHWA regulation must be complied with.³⁴

The operating rules of Part 392 include topics such as alcohol and drug prohibitions, safe loading, railroad crossings, driving in hazardous conditions, required emergency signals and equipment for stopped CMV's, prohibition of radar detection devices, and prohibitions against a motor carrier scheduling runs between points in such a period of time that would require the CMV to speed.

G. AVAILABLE INFORMATION AND WEBSITES OF INTEREST

www.fmcsa.dot.gov Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration

www.ntsb.gov National Transportation Safety Board

www.safersys.org Safety & Fitness Electronic Records System

of the FMSCA

www.transportlaw.com Transportation Consumer Protection

Council, Inc.

www.translaw.org Transportation Lawyers Association

www.trucking.org American Trucking Association

www.jjkeller.com J.J. Keller & Associates

www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr Code of Federal Regulations

³⁴ 49 C.F.R. §392.2.

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³³ 49 C.F.R. §392.1.

www4.law.cornell.edu/uscode U.S. Code

www.dmvs.state.ga.us/cvc Department of Motor Vehicle Safety