

# US Transportation Department proposes to lengthen truckers' driving hours

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The Department of Transportation (DOT) is proposing new guidelines that would raise the number of hours truck drivers can operate their vehicles without resting from 10 to 12 hours. For 60 years truck drivers have operated under an 18-hour cycle that limits driving to a 10-hour shift with eight hours of rest. The new formula would establish a 24-hour cycle consisting of 12 hours on and 12 hours off.

The DOT proposal is being presented as a measure to reduce the number of accidents attributed to sleep deprivation. Last year alone over 5,000 people lost their lives in trucking-related accidents, according to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. The new proposal is claimed to be more compatible with a normal sleep cycle and the DOT claims it will avert 2,600 crashes, 115 deaths and nearly 3,000 serious injuries each year.

The proposals will do nothing to reduce the economic pressures on truckers—such as stagnating incomes and the high cost of loan payments for their vehicles, as well as fuel, maintenance and licenses—that force them to work dangerously long hours. If enacted the new guidelines would be monitored by electronic devices installed in trucks. Truckers who violate the policy would be fined \$550. Any attempt by truckers to tamper with the devices would result in even heavier penalties.

Critics have already registered concerns over the policy of having truckers drive 12 hours straight. “The bad thing is that drivers become fatigued after the sixth, seventh or eighth hour,” a researcher told the *Washington Post*. “Rest breaks do not promote recovery.” The 12-hour rule will also result in a greater number of hours being logged each week.

The American Trucking Association is opposing the proposal for its own reasons. Currently, the trucking

companies and industries that employ just-in-time methods have compelled drivers to operate on continuous 18-hour cycles, with many operators reaching their 60-hour weekly driving limit in just four or five days. Many trucking companies oppose the proposed guidelines because the 12-hour rest period threatens to disrupt their tight schedules and would require them to hire more drivers.

The DOT is allowing 90 days for comment on the proposal and will hold seven public hearings around the country before it rules on any final implementation.



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