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Checklist for Quality Programs in Tractor-Trailer Driver Training

This Checklist is a yardstick for motor carriers, truck driver employers, truck safety advocates, prospective students and others in measuring the quality of a tractor-trailer driver training program.

Formal training is the most reliable way to learn the many special skills required for safe truck driving. The more skills that are learned in supervised training, the fewer that need to be learned on the job. Such training is available from private truck driver training schools, public education institutions and in-house motor carrier training programs. Because of the important role in truck safety, the trucking industry has implemented minimum standards by which to measure training programs. The standards are administered through the Professional Truck Driver Institute (PTDI). Training institutions voluntarily certify their courses to meet PTDI standards. Not all schools have chosen to certify their courses.

You can use the following Checklist to evaluate a course against PTDI standards. **PTDI-certified courses have met all of these standards and must maintain them for continued certification.** The Checklist is only a brief treatment of the standards by which truck driver training quality is measured. It is not intended to provide an exhaustive treatment of evaluation standards.

To find the answer to these questions, you may want to question school personnel, current students or graduates, and motor carriers who hire graduates from the school.

COURSE ADMINISTRATION

Truth in Advertising & Public Information

- Is the course accurately and clearly defined and explained in printed and multi-media materials on topics such as costs, tuition reimbursement, training provided, types of vehicles used, graduation and employment rates, student's prospective income upon graduation, classroom hours and actual individual driving time?
- Does the school actually provide the course claimed?
- Can the school meet its obligations to students, employees and employers?
- If the school advertises a PTDI-certified course, is THIS course actually certified? (Note: PTDI certifies specific courses, not the school or all courses.) The school should have a current "Certification of Course" certificate.

Chain of Command

- Is the organizational framework clearly defined, showing responsibility for instruction and administration?

Administrative Institutional Support

- Does administration provide appropriate facilities and up-to-date equipment and training materials?

Course Goals

- Are there clearly stated goals that match the needs of students and the trucking industry?

Administrative Qualifications

- Is the course planned and directed by professional and support personnel who possess appropriate education and experience to qualify them for their assignments?

Student Eligibility

- Are there clear, written eligibility requirements that are followed?
- Are they provided to prospective students?
- Must an applicant meet minimum federal and state/provincial driver qualification requirements? These include regulations related to drug screens, age physical condition, licensing, driving ability, and driving record as stated in the school's admissions policy?

Written Policies

- Are there written policies regarding safety, liability and rules?
- Are they provided to instructors and all students upon admission?

Recruitment and Admissions

- Do admissions follow written procedures?
- Does the policy include/specify the minimum federal and state/provincial driver qualification requirements that the student must meet in order to engage in the required behind-the-wheel instruction as well as to be eligible for a driver position upon graduation?
- Is a copy of the admission policy provided to the student?

CURRICULUM

Course Outline

- Does the course outline clearly identify units of instruction including their sequence, broad purpose and general content?
- Is the course outline provided to all participants and others?

Course Content & Objectives

- Is the course composed of units of instruction that cover the knowledge and skills required to operate a tractor-trailer safely and properly?

Print Materials

- Are instructional materials appropriate for the ability of the trainee?
- Are materials provided to each trainee?
- Do the materials contain up-to-date information?

Audio-Visual/Multimedia Materials/Simulation

- Are materials up-to-date, accurate and fit into the lessons?

INSTRUCTIONAL PERSONNEL

Instructor Qualifications

Instructors should possess a combination of education and experiences that clearly qualify them for their assignments. At least the following elements are included:

- Do driving instructors have at least three years of experience as licensed, successful tractor-trailer drivers with a good driving record, meet state requirements and school policy, and meet Part 391 of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations?
- Do instructors have teacher/instructional skills?
- Do instructors have a state/provincial license or permit, if applicable?

Instructor Staff Development and Supervision

- Are instructors knowledgeable and trained to teach the curriculum?
- Do instructors participate in a regular staff development program?
- Are instructors carefully supervised and evaluated?

TRAINING VEHICLES

Condition of Vehicles

- Are vehicles in good mechanical condition and meet applicable federal and state/provincial safety requirements/
- Are vehicles appropriate to the use made of the vehicle by the school?

Industry Standard for Vehicles

- Are training vehicles comparable in size and power to those used by motor carriers in the area?

INSTRUCTION

Classroom/Lab Instruction

- Does instruction cover the subject areas identified by PTDI curriculum and skill standards? (See “Primary Functions/Duties of a Tractor-Trailer Driver”)
- Does classroom instruction include the use of aids such as videos, displays, textbooks, models, charts, etc.?

Instructional Time

- Does each student receive at least 104 (60-minute) hours in classroom and lab time? (Lab includes non-driving time on the range under the supervision of an instructor. Observation time does not count as instructional time.)
- Does each student receive at least 44 (60-minute) hours of actual behind-the-wheel time? (This is time with hands actually on the wheel, with at least 12 hours on the range and 12 on the road and the other 20 hours on either range or road.)
- Does street/road instruction include night driving principles and at least one hour of behind-the-wheel time for each student?
- Does at least 25% of street instruction for each student include a trailer loaded with a minimum of 15,000 pounds?

Classroom Conditions

- Is the learning environment safe, sanitary and comfortable?
- Are furnishings, light, temperature, ventilation and space adequate?

Student/Instructor/Truck Ratio

- Does classroom and lab instruction average one instructor for not more than each group of 30 students over the year, and never exceed 36 students?
- Is there never more than one instructor to three trucks on the range?
- During driving, is there one instructor per truck and never more than four trainees in the truck?

Lesson Plans (Classroom, Lab, Range and Street)

- Do instructors use lesson plans to guide each session?
- Are students provided with behind-the-wheel lesson driving procedures along with a list of safety rules for street driving?

Range Conditions

- Is the range safe and controlled?
- Is the range free of obstructions and the surface enable the driver to maneuver safely and free from interference from other vehicles that may also be operating on the range?
- Are there adequate sight lines?

Street Instruction Conditions

- Is driving practiced under various roadway and traffic conditions?

Independent Study

- Independent study may be substituted for classroom instruction for up to 1/3 of the classroom instruction if it is sufficiently documented and quality materials used. This is not the same as homework.

Length of Day

- Is the total time for a typical instructional day average 10 hours or less, including direct contact instructional hours and independent study, if used?

Tests (Classroom, Lab, Range, Street)

- Do written classroom/lab tests test mastery of a sample of knowledge objectives for each unit of instruction?
- Do range tests assess student proficiency in (a) fundamental vehicle control skills and (b) routine driving procedures?
- Do road or on-the-street tests assess the objectives of the training?
- Do road tests use routes that permit a broad range of observations and are they planned in advance?
- Are behind-the-wheel proficiency tests administered with a standard van or box type tandem axle trailer with a minimum length of 45 feet, and a tractor with a tandem axle?

Graduation

- Does a student have to successfully complete the course equivalent to PTDI content and hours, including tests and road tests before graduation?
- Does a student secure a CDL before graduation is conferred?

OUTCOMES**Follow-up**

- Is a follow-up system used to determine student employment verification and to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the training?
- Does follow-up provide information on why graduates are not employed?
- Are student critiques of the school used?

In-Training File

- Is an "in-training" file maintained for each trainee?
- Does the file contain training records, attendance/time records, test results, unit completion and progress information?

Student Records

- Are complete records of graduates kept for at least five years, permanent records for at least 10 years, and securely maintained?
- Are transcripts provided upon request?

Behind-the-Wheel Time Records

- Does each student keep a “driver duty status record” to document time behind the wheel?
- Do both the student and instructor “sign-off” on the record?

EXTERNSHIP OPTION

An externship option allows a training course to defer up to 14 hours of the 44 behind-the-wheel hours to a trucking firm. For each three hours with a trucking company, one hour BTW is earned for credit. If a school uses this option, a number of conditions must be met:

- Is there weekly student evaluation?
- Are there objectives that specify and direct training?
- Are skilled and experienced driver-trainers teaching and monitoring training?
- Are quality training materials used?
- Does curriculum describe the elements of training that the trainee will experience?
- Is there performance assessment of critical skills?
- Is there a system of feedback and record keeping for the trainee, both for the trainee and the school?
- Are program policies on issues such as attendance, pay, insurance, and liability clearly articulated?
- Is there a formal agreement between the carrier and the training institution?

