# Truck Drivers and Driver/ Sales Workers

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# **Significant Points**

- Overall job opportunities should be favorable.
- Competition is expected for jobs offering the highest earnings or most favorable work schedules.
- A commercial driver's license is required to operate large trucks.

## Nature of the Work

Truck drivers are a constant presence on the Nation's highways and interstates. They deliver everything from automobiles to canned food. Firms of all kinds rely on trucks to pick up and deliver goods because no other form of transportation can deliver goods door-to-door. Even though many goods travel at least part of their journey by ship, train, or airplane, almost everything is carried by trucks at some point.

Before leaving the terminal or warehouse, truck drivers check the fuel level and oil in their trucks. They also inspect the trucks to make sure that the brakes, windshield wipers, and lights are working and that a fire extinguisher, flares, and other safety equipment are aboard and in working order. Drivers make sure their cargo is secure and adjust the mirrors so that both sides of the truck are visible from the driver's seat. Drivers report equipment that is inoperable, missing, or loaded improperly to the dispatcher.

Drivers keep a log of their activities, as required by the U.S. Department of Transportation, to the condition of the truck, and the circumstances of any accidents.

Heavy truck and tractor-trailer drivers operate trucks or vans with a capacity of at least 26,000 pounds Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW). They transport goods including cars, livestock, and other materials in liquid, loose, or packaged form. Many routes are from city to city and cover long distances. Some companies use two drivers on very long runs—one drives while the other sleeps in a berth behind the cab. These "sleeper" runs can last for days, or even weeks. Trucks on sleeper runs typically stop only for fuel, food, loading, and unloading.

Some heavy truck and tractor-trailer drivers who have regular runs transport freight to the same city on a regular basis. Other drivers perform ad hoc runs because shippers request varying service to different cities every day.

Long-distance heavy truck and tractor-trailer drivers spend most of their working time behind the wheel but also may have to load or unload their cargo. This is especially common when drivers haul specialty cargo because they may be the only ones at the destination familiar with procedures or certified to handle the materials. Auto-transport drivers, for example, position cars on the trailers at the manufacturing plant and remove them at the dealerships. When picking up or delivering furniture, drivers of long-distance moving vans hire local workers to help them load or unload.

Light or delivery services truck drivers operate vans and trucks weighing less than 26,000 pounds GVW. They pick up or deliver merchandise and packages within a specific area. This may

include short "turnarounds" to deliver a shipment to a nearby city, pick up another loaded truck or van, and drive it back to their home base the same day. These services may require use of electronic delivery tracking systems to track the whereabouts of the merchandise or packages. Light or delivery services truck drivers usually load or unload the merchandise at the customer's place of business. They may have helpers if there are many deliveries to make during the day or if the load requires heavy moving. Typically, before the driver arrives for work, material handlers load the trucks and arrange items for ease of delivery. Customers must sign receipts for goods and pay drivers the balance due on the merchandise if there is a cash-on-delivery arrangement. At the end of the day, drivers turn in receipts, payments, records of deliveries made, and any reports on mechanical problems with their trucks.

A driver's responsibilities and assignments change according to the type of loads transported and their vehicle's size. The duration of runs depends on the types of cargo and the destinations. Local drivers may provide daily service for a specific route or region, while other drivers make longer, intercity and interstate deliveries. Interstate and intercity cargo tends to vary from job to job more than local cargo does.

Some local truck drivers have sales and customer service responsibilities. The primary responsibility of *driver/sales workers*, or *route drivers*, is to deliver and sell their firms' products over established routes or within an established territory. They sell goods such as food products, including restaurant takeout items, or pick up and deliver items such as laundry. Their response to customer complaints and requests can make the difference between a large order and a lost customer. Route drivers may also take orders and collect payments.

The duties of driver/sales workers vary according to their industry, the policies of their employer, and the emphasis placed on their sales responsibility. Most have wholesale routes that deliver to businesses and stores, rather than to homes. For example, wholesale bakery driver/sales workers deliver and arrange bread, cakes, rolls, and other baked goods on display racks in grocery stores. They estimate how many of each item to stock by paying close attention to what is selling. They may recommend changes in a store's order or encourage the manager to stock new bakery products. Laundries that rent linens, towels, work clothes, and other items employ driver/sales workers to visit businesses regularly to replace soiled laundry. Their duties also may include soliciting new customers along their sales route.

After completing their route, driver/sales workers place orders for their next deliveries based on product sales and customer requests.

Satellites and the Global Positioning System link many trucks with their company's headquarters. Troubleshooting information, directions, weather reports, and other important communications can be instantly relayed to the truck. Drivers can easily communicate with the dispatcher to discuss delivery schedules and what to do in the event of mechanical problems. The satellite link also allows the dispatcher to track the truck's location, fuel consumption, and engine performance. Some drivers also work with computerized inventory tracking equipment. It is important for the producer, warehouse, and customer to know their products' location at all times so they can maintain a high quality of service.

*Work environment.* Truck driving has become less physically demanding because most trucks now have more comfortable



Overall job opportunities for truck drivers should be favorable

seats, better ventilation, and improved, ergonomically designed cabs. Although these changes make the work environment less taxing, driving for many hours at a stretch, loading and unloading cargo, and making many deliveries can be tiring. Local truck drivers, unlike long-distance drivers, usually return home in the evening. Some self-employed long-distance truck drivers who own and operate their trucks spend most of the year away from home.

The U.S. Department of Transportation governs work hours and other working conditions of truck drivers engaged in interstate commerce. A long-distance driver may drive for 11 hours and work for up to 14 hours—including driving and non-driving duties—after having 10 hours off-duty. A driver may not drive after having worked for 60 hours in the past 7 days or 70 hours in the past 8 days unless they have taken at least 34 consecutive hours off. Most drivers are required to document their time in a logbook. Many drivers, particularly on long runs, work close to the maximum time permitted because they typically are compensated according to the number of miles or hours they drive. Drivers on long runs face boredom, loneliness, and fatigue. Drivers often travel nights, holidays, and weekends to avoid traffic delays.

Local truck drivers frequently work 50 or more hours a week. Drivers who handle food for chain grocery stores, produce markets, or bakeries typically work long hours—starting late at night or early in the morning. Although most drivers have regular routes, some have different routes each day. Many local truck drivers, particularly driver/sales workers, load and unload their own trucks. This requires considerable lifting, carrying, and walking each day.

# Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

A commercial driver's license (CDL) is required to drive large trucks and a regular driver's license is required to drive all other trucks. Training for the CDL is offered by many private and public vocational-technical schools. Many jobs driving smaller trucks require only brief on-the-job training.

Education and training. Taking driver-training courses is a good way to prepare for truck driving jobs and to obtain a commercial drivers license (CDL). High school courses in driver training and automotive mechanics also may be helpful. Many private and public vocational-technical schools offer tractor-trailer driver training programs. Students learn to maneuver large vehicles on crowded streets and in highway traffic. They also learn to inspect trucks and freight for compliance with regulations. Some States require prospective drivers to complete a training course in basic truck driving before getting their CDL.

Completion of a program does not guarantee a job. Some programs provide only a limited amount of actual driving experience. People interested in attending a driving school should check with local trucking companies to make sure the school's training is acceptable. The Professional Truck Driver Institute (PTDI), a nonprofit organization established by the trucking industry, manufacturers, and others, certifies driver-training courses at truck driver training schools that meet industry standards and Federal Highway Administration guidelines for training tractor-trailer drivers.

Training given to new drivers by employers is usually informal and may consist of only a few hours of instruction from an experienced driver, sometimes on the new employee's own time. New drivers may also ride with and observe experienced drivers before getting their own assignments. Drivers receive additional training to drive special types of trucks or handle hazardous materials. Some companies give 1 to 2 days of classroom instruction covering general duties, the operation and loading of a truck, company policies, and the preparation of delivery forms and company records. Driver/sales workers also receive training on the various types of products their company carries so that they can effectively answer questions about the products and more easily market them to their customers.

New drivers sometimes start on panel trucks or other small straight trucks. As they gain experience and show competent driving skills, new drivers may advance to larger, heavier trucks and finally to tractor-trailers.

Licensure. State and Federal regulations govern the qualifications and standards for truck drivers. All drivers must comply with Federal regulations and any State regulations that are in excess of those Federal requirements. Truck drivers must have a driver's license issued by the State in which they live, and most employers require a clean driving record. Drivers of trucks designed to carry 26,000 pounds or more—including most tractor-trailers, as well as bigger straight trucks—must obtain a commercial driver's license. All truck drivers who operate trucks transporting hazardous materials must obtain a CDL, regardless of truck size. In order to receive the hazardous materials endorsement, a driver must be fingerprinted and submit to a criminal background check by the Transportation Security Administration. In many States, a regular driver's license is sufficient for driving light trucks and vans.

To qualify for a CDL, an applicant must have a clean driving record, pass a written test on rules and regulations, and demonstrate that they can operate a commercial truck safely. A national database permanently records all driving violations committed by those with a CDL. A State will check these records and deny a CDL to those who already have a license suspended or revoked in another State. Licensed drivers must accompany trainees until they get their own CDL. A person may not hold more than one license at a time and must surrender any other licenses when a CDL is issued. Information on how to apply for a CDL may be obtained from State motor vehicle administrations.

Many States allow those who are as young as 18 years old to drive trucks within their borders. To drive a commercial vehicle between States one must be at least 21 years of age, according to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations published by the U.S. Department of Transportation (U. S. DOT). Regulations also require drivers to pass a physical examination once every 2 years. Physical qualifications include good hearing, at least 20/40 vision with glasses or corrective lenses, and a 70-degree field of vision in each eye. Drivers may not be colorblind. Drivers must also be able to hear a forced whisper in one ear at not less than 5 feet, with a hearing aid if needed. Drivers must have normal use of arms and legs and normal blood pressure. People with epilepsy or diabetes controlled by insulin are not permitted to be interstate truck drivers.

Federal regulations also require employers to test their drivers for alcohol and drug use as a condition of employment and require periodic random tests of the drivers while they are on duty. Drivers may not use any controlled substances, unless prescribed by a licensed physician. A driver must not have been convicted of a felony involving the use of a motor vehicle or a crime involving drugs, driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol, refusing to submit to an alcohol test required by a State or its implied consent laws or regulations, leaving the scene of a crime, or causing a fatality through negligent operation of a motor vehicle. All drivers must be able to read and speak English well enough to read road signs, prepare reports, and communicate with law enforcement officers and the public.

Other qualifications. Many trucking companies have higher standards than those described here. Many firms require that drivers be at least 22 years old, be able to lift heavy objects, and have driven trucks for 3 to 5 years. Many prefer to hire high school graduates and require annual physical examinations. Companies have an economic incentive to hire less risky drivers, as good drivers use less fuel and cost less to insure.

Drivers must get along well with people because they often deal directly with customers. Employers seek driver/sales workers who speak well and have self-confidence, initiative, tact, and a neat appearance. Employers also look for responsible, self-motivated individuals who are able to work well with little supervision.

**Advancement.** Although most new truck drivers are assigned to regular driving jobs immediately, some start as extra drivers—substituting for regular drivers who are ill or on vacation. Extra drivers receive a regular assignment when an opening occurs.

Truck drivers can advance to driving runs that provide higher earnings, preferred schedules, or better working conditions. Local truck drivers may advance to driving heavy or specialized trucks or transfer to long-distance truck driving. Working for companies that also employ long-distance drivers is the best way to advance to these positions. Few truck drivers become dispatchers or managers.

Many long-distance truck drivers purchase trucks and go into business for themselves. Although some of these owner-operators are successful, others fail to cover expenses and go out of business. Owner-operators should have good business sense as well as truck driving experience. Courses in accounting, business, and business mathematics are helpful. Knowledge of truck mechanics can enable owner-operators to perform their own routine maintenance and minor repairs.

# **Employment**

Truck drivers and driver/sales workers held about 3.4 million jobs in 2006. Of these workers, 445,000 were driver/sales workers and 2.9 million were truck drivers. Most truck drivers find employment in large metropolitan areas or along major interstate roadways where trucking, retail, and wholesale companies tend to have their distribution outlets. Some drivers work in rural areas, providing specialized services such as delivering newspapers to customers.

The truck transportation industry employed 26 percent of all truck drivers and driver/sales workers in the United States. Another 25 percent worked for companies engaged in wholesale or retail trade. The remaining truck drivers and driver/sales workers were distributed across many industries, including construction and manufacturing.

Around 9 percent of all truck drivers and driver/sales workers were self-employed. Of these, a significant number were owner-operators who either served a variety of businesses independently or leased their services and trucks to a trucking company.

#### Job Outlook

Overall job opportunities should be favorable for truck drivers, although opportunities may vary greatly in terms of earnings, weekly work hours, number of nights spent on the road, and quality of equipment. Competition is expected for jobs offering the highest earnings or most favorable work schedules. Average growth is expected.

**Projections data from the National Employment Matrix** 

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected Change, employment, 2006-16		<b>U</b> ,
			2016	Number	Percent
Driver/sales workers and truck drivers	53-3030	3,356,000	3,614,000	258,000	8
Driver/sales workers	53-3031	445,000	421,000	-24,000	-5
Truck drivers, heavy and tractor-trailer	53-3032	1,860,000	2,053,000	193,000	10
Truck drivers, light or delivery services	53-3033	1,051,000	1,140,000	89,000	8

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

Employment change. Overall employment of truck drivers and driver/sales workers is expected to increase by 8 percent over the 2006-16 decade, which is about as fast as the average for all occupations, due to growth in the economy and in the amount of freight carried by truck. Because it is such a large occupation, truck drivers will have a very large number of new jobs arise, over 258,000 over the 2006-16 period. Competing forms of freight transportation—rail, air, and ship transportation—require trucks to move the goods between ports, depots, airports, warehouses, retailers, and final consumers who are not connected to these other modes of transportation. Demand for long-distance drivers will remain strong because they can transport perishable and time-sensitive goods more effectively than alternate modes of transportation.

Job prospects. Job opportunities should be favorable for truck drivers. In addition to growth in demand for truck drivers, numerous job openings will occur as experienced drivers leave this large occupation to transfer to other fields of work, retire, or leave the labor force for other reasons. Jobs vary greatly in terms of earnings, weekly work hours, the number of nights spent on the road, and quality of equipment. There may be competition for the jobs with the highest earnings and most favorable work schedules. There will be more competition for jobs with local carriers than for those with long-distance carriers because of the more desirable working conditions of local carriers.

Job opportunities may vary from year to year since the output of the economy dictates the amount of freight to be moved. Companies tend to hire more drivers when the economy is strong and their services are in high demand. When the economy slows, employers hire fewer drivers or may lay off some drivers. Independent owner-operators are particularly vulnerable to slowdowns. Industries least likely to be affected by economic fluctuation, such as grocery stores, tend to be the most stable employers of truck drivers and driver/sales workers.

#### **Earnings**

Median hourly earnings of heavy truck and tractor-trailer drivers were \$16.85 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$13.33 and \$21.04 an hour. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$10.80, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$25.39 an hour. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of heavy truck and tractor-trailer drivers in May 2006 were:

General freight trucking	\$18.38
Grocery and related product wholesalers	18.01
Specialized freight trucking	16.40
Cement and concrete product manufacturing	15.26
Other specialty trade contractors	14.94

Median hourly earnings of light or delivery services truck drivers were \$12.17 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$9.31 and \$16.16 an hour. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$7.47, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$21.23 an hour. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of light or delivery services truck drivers in May 2006 were:

Couriers	\$17.80
General freight trucking	15.33
Grocery and related product wholesalers	12.84
Building material and supplies dealers	11.54
Automotive parts, accessories, and tire stores	8.38

Median hourly earnings of driver/sales workers, including commissions, were \$9.99 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$7.12 and \$15.00 an hour. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$6.19, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$20.30 an hour. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of driver/sales workers in May 2006 were:

Drycleaning and laundry services	\$14.81
Direct selling establishments	13.72
Grocery and related product wholesalers	12.37
Full-service restaurants	7.11
Limited-service eating places	7.02

Local truck drivers tend to be paid by the hour, with extra pay for working overtime. Employers pay long-distance drivers primarily by the mile. The per-mile rate can vary greatly from employer to employer and may even depend on the type of cargo being hauled. Some long-distance drivers are paid a percent of each load's revenue. Typically, earnings increase with mileage driven, seniority, and the size and type of truck driven. Most driver/sales workers receive commissions based on their sales in addition to their hourly wages.

Most self-employed truck drivers are primarily engaged in long-distance hauling. Many truck drivers are members of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. Some truck drivers employed by companies outside the trucking industry are members of unions representing the plant workers of the companies for which they work.

## **Related Occupations**

Other driving occupations include ambulance drivers and attendants, except emergency medical technicians; bus drivers; and taxi drivers and chauffeurs. Another occupation involving sales duties is sales representatives, wholesale and manufacturing.

# **Sources of Additional Information**

Information on truck driver employment opportunities is available from local trucking companies and local offices of the State employment service.

Information on career opportunities in truck driving may be obtained from:

➤ American Trucking Associations, Inc., 950 North Glebe Road., Suite 210, Arlington, VA 22203.

## Internet: http://www.trucking.org

A list of certified tractor-trailer driver training courses may be obtained from:

➤ Professional Truck Driver Institute, 2200 Mill Rd., Alexandria, VA 22314. Internet: http://www.ptdi.org

Information on union truck driving can be obtained from:

➤ The International Brotherhood of Teamsters, 25 Louisiana Ave. NW., Washington, DC 20001.

Information on becoming a truck driver may be obtained from: http://www.gettrucking.com