

## New trucker rules debated Feds want to raise number of hours drivers can work, yet still keep fatigue in check

Dina ElBoghdady / Detroit News Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON -- A federal plan aimed at keeping tired truckers off the road was greeted Tuesday with relief and concern among those involved in the issue.

The relief came from some truckers and safety advocates, who relish the prospect of updating the antiquated rule that governs how much time big rig truckers spend behind the wheel.

"Any change is going to be an improvement because it's a 60-year-old-law," said Marilyn Cochrane, a trucker for US Xpress.

But some critics say federal regulators offered a convoluted series of trade-offs that could undermine safety goals and threaten the trucking industry's viability.

"There is a danger that the rule is becoming so complex it can't be enforced," said David Snyder, assistant general counsel for the American Insurance Association. "Whether this is really workable in terms of demand on the trucking industry remains to be seen."

The U.S. Transportation Department's plan, which should be finalized this year after a series of public hearings, would allow long-distance truckers to drive more consecutive hours in a day with longer rest periods.

But truckers who spend more than a day away from their home base would have to carry black box recorders in their cab that track their hours and miles. The recorders are controversial because they raise privacy and legal liability issues.

Data from the recorders would be used by police officers to enforce work rules, which are regularly flouted by truckers because of deadline pressures and financial incentives to finish the trip.

"The objective with the recorder is to give us access to the kind of data we need to make judgments" about who is not complying with the law, U.S.

Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater said.

The law allows truckers to drive 10 consecutive hours followed by an eight-hour break. The 18-hour schedule, the government argues, disrupts the truckers' sleep cycles.

So the government wants a 24-hour work day, which would allow truckers 14 hours on duty -- with 12 hours of drive time and a two-hour break taken in blocks of 30 minutes. Mandatory time off would amount to 10 hours in a day.

Other truckers who operate within six hours driving distance from their working location or whose primary duties are not driving-related would operate under a different set of rules specific to their category -- an issue that many say could get confusing.

The fragmentation of the regulation into five different driving and off-duty systems "creates an enforcement nightmare for public authorities," said Jackie Gillan of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety.

The American Trucking Association opposes the new rule because of its black box mandate and because they say it gives truckers less time in a day to do their jobs.

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### Bill targets tired truckers Plan would allow more road hours, with more rest time

Dina ElBoghdady / Detroit News Washington Bureau

BODY: WASHINGTON -- The federal government is expected to unveil a proposal today that it says would prevent 115 deaths and 3,000 injuries a year by keeping tired truckers off the road.

The plan would allow big-rig truckers to drive more hours with longer rest periods. It also would require some cabs to carry

black-box recorders to track on-road hours.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration proposal, which would revamp 60-year-old trucker work rules, would cost the trucking industry \$3.4 billion over the next 10 years, the government estimates.

The controversial plan, which would become final after a public comment period, would allow truckers to be on the road for 12 hours in a 14-hour period, followed by a 10-hour break.

Now, truckers are allowed 10 hours of consecutive driving followed by an eight-hour break.

But they often drive illegally for longer periods to meet deadlines and reap financial incentives. Recorders are available today, but not required by law.

"I'm very disappointed that they will increase the number of hours driven," said Joan Claybrook, a highway safety advocate.

The American Trucking Associations opposes recorders for legal and privacy reasons.