



## FMCSA Medical Qualifications: Alternative Vision Standard

January 2022



**Introduction:** On January 21, 2022, FMCSA [published](#) the alternative vision standard final rule which allows individuals who do not satisfy, with their worse eye, either the existing distant visual acuity standard with corrective lenses or the field of vision standard, or both, to be physically qualified to operate a commercial motor vehicle (CMV) in interstate commerce under specified conditions.

Prior to this final rule, FMCSA administered a vision exemption program to allow certain individuals who did not meet the vision standard to be qualified to drive CMVs. The agency determined that drivers reviewed under the waiver program demonstrated a level of safety equivalent to other commercial drivers on the road. Accordingly, the Agency concludes that individuals who satisfy the alternative vision standard requirements will not create an increased risk of unsafe operation of a CMV due to their vision.

The new alternative standard replaces the current vision exemption program, allowing drivers with a vision deficiency that does not interfere with the safe operation of a CMV to enter the trucking workforce without the added burden of applying for a medical qualification exemption. Current exemption holders have 1 year after the effective date of this rule to comply with the alternative vision standard, at which time all exemptions issued under 49 U.S.C. 31315(b) become void.

**The Details:** The alternative vision standard provides that, to be physically qualified, the individual must:

- 1) have, in the better eye, distant visual acuity of at least 20/40 (Snellen), with or without corrective lenses, and field of vision of at least 70 degrees in the horizontal meridian;
- 2) be able to recognize the colors of traffic signals and devices showing standard red, green, and amber;
- 3) have a stable vision deficiency; and
- 4) have had sufficient time pass since the vision deficiency became stable to adapt to and compensate for the change in vision.

**Certification Process:** To be qualified under the alternative vision standard, an individual must receive a vision evaluation from an ophthalmologist or optometrist as well as a physical qualification examination from a certified medical examiner (ME).

A vision specialist must use their best medical judgement to determine if the individual meets the four requirements outlined in the alternative standard and complete a Vision Evaluation Report (Form MCSA-5871) indicating these findings. The revised form is [available](#) in the rulemaking docket and the agency has requested a revision to the approved Medical Qualification Requirements ICR through this final rule. The report will ask the vision specialist to certify that, in their medical opinion, the individual is capable of safely operating a CMV with

his/her vision condition. Individuals qualified under the alternative vision standard must have vision evaluations annually unless it is determined that more frequent visits are necessary.

A medical examiner will review the Vision Evaluation Report, the individual's medical history, and other available information to determine if the individual meets the criteria to be certified under the alternative vision standard and all other physical qualifications to operate a CMV. The ME can issue a medical examination certificate (MEC) for a maximum of 12 months.

**Carrier Conducted Road Test:** Individuals being qualified under the alternative vision standard for the first time must perform a road test administered by their motor carrier before operating in interstate commerce. However, an individual does *not* have to complete a road test if they have 3 years of intrastate or specific excepted interstate CMV driving experience with the vision deficiency, hold a valid Federal vision exemption, or are medically certified under the previously administered vision waiver study program in § 391.64(b).

The employing motor carrier should conduct the road test in accordance with the road test already required by [49 CFR §391.31](#). All prospective drivers should be assessed in the same manner regardless of whether they are medically certified under the alternate vision standard. FMCSA indicates that this road test will act as an "important additional requirement to ensure that the employer is satisfied that the individual qualified under the alternative standard can operate a CMV safely under the conditions involved in the operation."

**Effective date:** This final rule is effective March 22, 2022.

For more information, please contact ATA's Safety Policy Department: (703) 838-1857