

Remarks of
Rose McMurray, Associate Administrator for Policy and Program Development
FEDERAL MOTOR CARRIER SAFETY ADMINISTRATION
to the
NATIONAL REGISTRY OF CERTIFIED MEDICAL EXAMINERS
PUBLIC LISTENING SESSION
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA
JUNE 29, 2006

Opening Remarks

Good morning everyone. It's nice to see all of you here. I want to welcome you all to San Diego and to this public meeting to discuss the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's proposal to establish a National Registry of Certified Medical Examiners (NRCME). My name is Rose McMurray. I work in Washington, DC, at FMCSA headquarters, and I am responsible for developing the medical programs, along with a very capable staff, some of whom are here today.

Our plan this morning is to discuss two topics: one being the main reason you are here, the National Registry project, but we also want to describe an important ancillary project that we're working on called the Medical Review Board (MRB). The MRB will be convening its first public meeting in August 2006 to begin the process of examining the full range of our current medical standards. We'll talk a little more about that later today. We have two briefings this morning that will describe these two programs. At the end of the briefings, we will then actively solicit your input and reactions to what you have heard.

We're here to listen to you today and to get your views on how you think these projects are progressing, our plans, and our early thinking. This is important because before we go to rulemaking on these topics, we want to ensure you have an opportunity to influence the course and content of that information.

Administrative Highlights

These public meetings are very important to us. They really help us to gauge whether we are soliciting the kind of information that is useful for us and for you. We have evaluation forms in the back of the room that we'd like you to fill out before you leave because we want to see how you felt about this session today: the logistics, the location, and the materials covered. This is the only way we're going to be able to improve as we go along. We are also recording the proceedings today, and the transcript will be available to you at a later point. The transcript will include all the information presented this morning, as well as your comments. Additionally, all the presentations that you see this morning will be made available to you. We will let you know how to access these later today.

We have two American Sign Language interpreters here this morning – Paul Lambert and Tracey Norris. They will be performing an important service today, and we thank them for being here.

I'd also like to thank my staff from the Physical Qualifications Division of FMCSA. Along with our wonderful contractor, Axiom Resource Management, they have put together today's events and I want to thank them. Let me briefly introduce each of them and other people from FMCSA who are here to answer your questions and support our medical program. Dr. Maggi Gunnels is the Chief of the Physical Qualifications Division. Ms. Kaye Kirby is the team leader on the Medical Review Board and the National Registry projects. Mr. Frederic Wood is here from our legal shop. He is helping to advise us on the course of our medical programs. Mr. Terry Wolf is our Division Administrator from the State of California. Many of you may already know Terry. We're happy he's here to talk a bit about what's on your mind with respect to the medical program. Our contactors include Glenna Tinney, who will be a presenting later. She is the Project Manager for this program. Margo Weeks is the Communications Manager on this project, and Carmen Truesdale is the Research Analyst. We thank all of them for the great support they are giving us on this program.

Now, as I said earlier, we're going to discuss two topics today. The National Registry is the main purpose for this meeting, but we also thought it was important for you to understand how the Medical Review Board will work since the programs are related. This is the first of three public listening sessions we have scheduled for this summer to discuss these programs. These meetings are follow-up on a commitment that we made a year ago in Arlington, VA, in which we promised we would hold some field location listening sessions. The next listening session is scheduled for July 26th in St. Louis, and the third and final session will be held in Washington, DC, at Department of Transportation headquarters. That session will occur in conjunction with the first public meeting of the Medical Review Board and will be conducted a little more formally than this one because the Medical Review Board activity is governed by the Federal Advisory Committee Act, which has more formal requirements for making and recording comments. These listening sessions are very important to us because they help us to understand how these proposals may affect you.

Overview of FMCSA

Let me begin with a brief discussion of the Federal Motor Carrier Administration. Many of you in the room may know what we do, but there may be others who are not as familiar. Basically, we are a safety regulatory agency of over 1,000 people. We are part of the United States Department of Transportation – one of about 16 safety regulatory agencies within the Department. Our employees are located throughout the United States in all 50 states and U. S. territories. Most of our staff – about 80 percent of the 1,000 employees – works in the field. They are the Agency's first line of safety defense. These employees work very closely with the states we give grants to and provide other technical support for the work involved in achieving FMCSA's mission.

Our basic mission is to promote truck and bus safety on our Nation's highways. We set standards for trucks and buses and for the drivers of those vehicles. We determine the safety compliance of companies and drivers. We conduct safety reviews and, along with the states, conduct roadside inspections at weigh stations on the highways. Most of the time, these stations are staffed by state employees who receive Federal funding. We collect information about companies, their vehicle maintenance records, vehicle performance, and drivers' hours of service compliance. We also take all this roadside data and data from other investigations, analyze it, and use it to develop research plans to supplement existing data about safety on the highway.

FMCSA is held accountable by the President and Congress to reduce the number of fatalities and injuries on our highways. We have a very ambitious goal. It's a 12-year goal, set back in 1996, to drive fatalities down by 41 percent. I have to tell you we've been successful because the rate at which the numbers have been coming down has been steady even though the actual numbers, the absolute numbers, have risen slightly in the past few years.

We work closely with many organizations and stakeholders who also have an interest in driving these numbers down. In 2004, the last year in which we had validated data, injuries resulting from crashes of large trucks totaled approximately 116,000, and there were 13,000 injuries resulting from commercial buses and motor coaches. In that same year, truck-involved fatalities killed over 5,000 people, including CMV (commercial motor vehicle) drivers and drivers in passenger cars. That number has been holding steady for the last few years. Approximately 36 fatalities resulted from motor coach crashes in the United States in the same time period. Our job at FMCSA is to find solutions for these problems, to search for ways to drive the numbers down for injuries and fatalities.

As many of you know, it's not just the human toll that these crashes take or the impact on American families, but it's also the economic burden. In 2004, it was estimated that motor vehicle crashes, particularly truck-involved and bus-involved crashes, cost the economy 29 billion dollars a year – a lot of money. So, in addition to the human aspect of reducing fatalities and injuries, we also look at the economic burden that these crashes represent.

As we do our work and research, it's becoming clearer in the data we gather that the driver is the predominant reason for commercial motor vehicle crashes. This also is true of crashes involving passenger cars. Vehicle issues are not as pronounced as the role and judgment of the driver in avoiding motor vehicle crashes. Therefore, FMCSA will be focusing more attention on the driver.

FMCSA Medical Standards

One of the cornerstones of commercial vehicle driver performance is the issue of medical qualification. We rely very heavily on the medical community to perform competent physical exams, but it is also important that medical examiners apply an understanding of what it takes to drive these vehicles. They are not like passenger cars; the demands are much greater. CMV drivers spend a lot of time behind the wheel. They also load and unload cargo, wait at terminals and climb in and out of vehicles. So, the demands for operating their vehicles are more pronounced than those for driving a private vehicle.

The current slide describes the major physical demands required of CMV drivers, and how those requirements have translated to our current medical standards, which are on the right. These standards are what will be the subject of the Medical Review Board. The MRB is being established to look at our existing body of medical requirements and ask the following questions. Are they up-to-date? Are they clear and understandable? Should they be revised? How should they be revised? What do medical interventions and treatments promise, and do we need to rethink those standards? This includes making recommendations about what should be included in the physical qualification standards for drivers and what the content of the educational curriculum should be for medical examiners to properly apply those standards.

It's vital for us to know who is qualified to apply these standards. Do they know what's required of drivers as they apply those standards? Again, we respect very much the medical training that

our medical examiners possess but also believe that it is important to ensure that medical examiners receive up-to-date guidance with respect to how to apply the standards.

Overview of Meeting Schedule

Let me finish with talking about what we will be doing today. I mentioned the two briefings that will be coming up. Kaye Kirby is going to present after me, and then there will be a 20-minute break. After the break, Glenna Tinney will present. We will then have a facilitated discussion in which we will be listening to you. Dr. Maggi Gunnels will moderate this portion of the meeting, soliciting your comments and feedback.

Closing Remarks

As I close my remarks, I want to remind you that this won't be the last time that you will have the opportunity to provide us with your perspective with regard to these initiatives. As I mentioned earlier, there will be a public portion to the Medical Review Board meeting in August. Dates for subsequent meetings of the Medical Review Board will be published in the Federal Register. We also are planning to issue a rulemaking on the National Registry, which will provide you another opportunity to comment.

Again, thank you for being here. I appreciate your participation. We really look forward to your reactions, your comments, your ideas, and, potentially, any opportunities that we may not be seeing in these two projects. Thank you.