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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS BY PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS, SCHOOLS & THE GENERAL PUBLIC

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS

Q. Why should I enroll in a PTDI certified course?

A. Employers will want to hire you, since they know PTDI-certified courses are based on national standards determined by the trucking industry so they will know you do not need extensive additional training.

Q. Is the Professional Truck Driver Institute (PTDI) a school?

A. No. PTDI certifies courses at truck driving schools but is not a school itself.

Q. What are the differences between certification and accreditation?

A. The certification process used by PTDI differs from the accrediting process used by regional and national organizations in their respective reviews of private and public schools.

Accreditation is essentially a self-evaluation by the applicant school in which they attest to the institutional ability of their school to provide the training program. Issues such as financial ability, recruiting and placement of students, educational objectives, faculty qualifications, student services, admission policies, and facilities are evaluated in terms of overall ability to put on the training program. An accreditation team visits the school to verify data contained in the self-evaluation report. This process typically does not include an in-depth review of the course offering nor an evaluation against specific standards.

Certification is a more focused review of the training course and does not rely on an extensive self-evaluation by the applicant school. Certification is conveyed upon the course, not the school, as some organizations offer several courses, some of which may not meet the PTDI training standards.

Q. What does PTDI look at in certifying a course?

A. The PTDI Certification Program focuses on the course offering and includes such items as a review of the subjects taught, the hours taught by subject, the hours the students receive (including actual behind-the-wheel time per student), admissions and placement policies, instructor qualifications, testing, safety inspections of training vehicles, and the facilities.

The specific training standards were adapted from the model curriculum and proposed minimum training standards developed by the Federal Highway Administration Office of Motor Carrier Safety.

Q. Are there other standards for truck driving schools?

A. There are no other national truck driver training standards in the U.S.

Q. What are the age requirements to attend a truck driver training course?

A. Schools have varying age requirements. However, a driver must be 18 years old for intrastate (within one state) driving and 21 years old for interstate (across state lines) driving. Intrastate driving is when you drive within one state.

Q. What are the types of schools that offer PTDI certified courses?

A. Publicly-funded institutions such as community colleges and technical schools; private institutions, and carrier schools.

Q. What is the average length of a course?

A. The average length of PTDI-certified courses is four to six weeks. Courses could be as short as two weeks (minimum of 148 contact hours with one-on-one training) to 12 weeks or more.

Q. How many hours of instruction should I receive?

A. PTDI requires a minimum of 104 hours in a classroom and lab setting combined. Lab includes such activities as pre-trip inspections, diagnosing/reporting malfunctions, handling cargo and using a simulator. PTDI requires a minimum of 44 hours behind-the-wheel (BTW) time per student, including a combination of range and street operation. Some time with loaded trailer and at night are also required. Observation time (including as a passenger in the cab) does not count toward PTDI-certifiable time. For more information on what to expect from a PTDI-certified course, please read the "Checklist for Quality Courses in Tractor-Trailer Driver Training" found at www.ptdi.org/schools or <http://www.ptdi.org/errata/ChecklistQualityCourses.pdf>.

Q. What is the average cost of courses?

A. The average cost of courses that are PTDI-certified is about \$4,980 (based on 2009 reporting of schools to PTDI.) This includes publicly-funded, private and carrier schools combined.

Q. Is financial aid available?

A. Financial aid may come by personal funds; private student loans (through school, bank or other financial institution, or finance companies); or public funds available for those who qualify through Stafford Loans, PLUS Loan, Pell Grant, Work-Study Programs, G.I. Bill and the Workforce Investment Act. Federal Title IV student financial aid is available through accredited schools that qualify. Various states may have funding for tuition. The Commercial Driver Training Foundation, Inc., (www.cdtfi.org) provides military scholarships for veterans honorably discharged from the military. In addition, carrier truck schools may pay the cost of the courses, depending on the employment contract you sign with the carrier. Some schools work with carriers that will pay for or reimburse the student's tuition. Check with individual schools to see if you qualify for any aid.

Q. Do schools offer housing?

A. It depends on the school.

Q. Do I receive a diploma or certificate upon completion?

A. All graduates of a PTDI-certified course who complete the minimum number of training hours as prescribed by PTDI's standards, and who have successfully completed all of the school's graduation requirements, will receive a PTDI Certificate of Attainment from the school. Alternately, a school may issue their own certificate with a PTDI Seal attached.

Q. Am I a certified driver when I complete a PTDI course?

A. No. Graduates of a PTDI-certified course are not themselves "certified." They have graduated from a PTDI-certified course and receive a PTDI Certificate or Seal of Attainment.

Q. What is the average starting salary for a driver?

A. According to the American Trucking Associations, with the return to normal business activity, a driver can earn an average of \$42,000 annually. (Jan. 2010)

Q. Besides pay, what are the typical benefits?

A. The typical benefits include insurance, retirement plans, paid vacations, and holidays.

Q. Is there any room for advancement?

A. Yes, professional drivers have the opportunity to advance in other areas including sales, management, logistics, and training.

Q. I want to come to the U.S. and drive trucks. What do I need to do?

A. When you emigrate to the U.S.A. and establish a residence here, you would have to qualify for a U.S. Commercial Driver's License by taking that exam in the state where you have established a residence. Contact the Department of Motor Vehicles in that state.

The cost for taking the exam will vary from state to state, along with any particular endorsements that you may need (e.g., hazardous materials, doubles and triples, etc.)

You would also need a work permit.

Q. I've had a felony conviction. Can I still be a truck driver?

A. Here is a link to the Federal Motor Carriers Safety Administration's rules and regulations for drivers: http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/rules-regulations/administration/fmcsr/fmcsrguide.asp?section_type=D. Go particularly to Part 391 for driver qualifications and disqualifications.

Then you might also want to ask the school for carriers who will hire those with felony convictions. Then contact those carriers to confirm what you are told. In addition, you may want to contact other carriers where you might want to work to see their requirements.

Q. Can PTDI help me find a job?

A. PTDI does not help drivers find jobs. Although we do not endorse services, you might check the driver job websites found in the Industry Links section of this website.

Q. The school I want to attend is rated the best. How can I be sure?

A. You must always consider and question the source of any claims of the school. Who is making the recommendation? On what basis is the claim being made? Is the source paid advertising? Is it from an independent third party who objectively evaluates the school? Is it from carriers who hire from the school?

The Professional Truck Driver Institute has industry standards for truck driving schools. Schools voluntarily choose to go through the PTDI-course certification process to have PTDI – an objective third party – come in and evaluate whether they are meeting these minimum industry standards.

Many schools would meet or exceed PTDI standards but have not chosen to go through this verification process. The "Checklist for Quality Courses in Tractor-Trailer Driver Training" found on the PTDI website is based on the minimum standards and can be used as a guideline for making an unofficial evaluation of a school, although you will still not be able to verify all points. Read it at <http://ptdi.org/schools/schools.aspx>.

Q. Where can I find a list of schools with PTDI certified courses?

A. To view a list of schools that have PTDI certified courses, please go to: www.ptdi.org/schools.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: SCHOOLS

Q. What is PTDI?

A. Since its inception in 1986, the Professional Truck Driver Institute, Inc. (PTDI) has become the nation's foremost advocate of standards and professionalism for entry-level truck driver training.

Q. What is the purpose of PTDI?

A. The purpose of PTDI is to advance tractor-trailer driver training, proficiency, safety, and professionalism by promoting high quality truck driver training courses and by verifying and publicly attesting to their quality.

Q. Why should I certify my course?

A. Voluntary certification is the PTDI process that grants public recognition to institutions whose courses for training tractor-trailer drivers meet or exceed industry established qualifications and criteria, as determined through initial and periodic evaluation by the PTDI. Certification is voluntary in that institutions request evaluation of their courses for PTDI certification.

The certification process provides professional judgment of course quality; encourages continuing course improvement; and increases industry use of tractor-trailer driver training courses because it assures employers, potential enrollees, governmental agencies and offices, the trucking industry, safety advocates, official bodies, and the public of the quality of specific courses at designated training organizations

Q. What are the eligibility requirements for PTDI certification?

A. To be eligible to certify a course, the school must:

- Be currently licensed or authorized by applicable local, state, and/or federal agencies.
- Have successfully operated a truck driver-training course for at least one uninterrupted year immediately prior to the date of application for certification. Or, if a school with a PTDI-certified course at another location is applying for certification of a course at an additional site, the new site has graduated four (4) classes or has been in operation for six (6) months, whichever is longer.

- Have graduated a minimum of fifteen (15) students in the course for which they are seeking certification within the twelve (12) months preceding the application.
- Express the amount of training offered in hours and other clearly defined quantitative units of measurement that can be converted easily to hours.
- Express expected trainee outcomes as competency-based performance criteria.
- Use an identified staff of individuals who are actively involved in training. Courses consisting only of lectures, broadcasts, audio-visual presentations, and other one-way communications are not eligible.

Q. I've just opened a school and have not had time to meet all these eligibility requirements.

A. You may apply for certification once your school is established and fulfill the eligibility requirements within the first 12 months of operation. The on-site visit would not be scheduled until you have conducted the course for at least six months or had two graduating classes, whichever is longer.

Q. I am planning to open a truck driving school. How can PTDI help me?

A. We suggest that you start by reviewing the Entry-Level Skill, Curriculum and Certification Standards. You can purchase these or download them from this website (www.ptdi.org/standards). These give you a good basis for starting your school. The curriculum standards detail what should be taught and the certification standards give minimums for administration, instructors, facilities, equipment, record keeping, etc. These standards are minimums as determined by the industry. You will need to find out what entity in your state licenses or approves schools and whether instructor licensing is required. You might want to see whether a carrier would partner with you to provide support and/or equipment.

Q. What does PTDI look for in a course?

A. Very briefly, PTDI looks at the following areas and examines questions such as:

COURSE ADMINISTRATION

- Is your course accurately and clearly defined and explained in printed materials on topics such as costs, training provided, outcomes, classroom hours and actual individual driving time? i.e., is advertising truthful?
- Do you have clear, written eligibility requirements for students that you follow?

INSTRUCTIONAL PERSONNEL

- Do your instructors possess a combination of education and experience that clearly qualify them for their assignments?
- Are instructors carefully supervised and evaluated, and do instructors participate in regular instructor development?

TRAINING VEHICLES

- Do your vehicles meet safety and industry requirements, contain occupant restraint systems of all occupants and contain working emergency equipment?

INSTRUCTION & CURRICULUM

- Does instruction cover the subject areas identified by PTDI curriculum and skill standards?
- Does each student receive at least 104 (60-minute) hours in classroom and lab time? (Lab is instruction that occurs outside the classroom that does not involve actual operation of the vehicle and its components; this includes 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?
- Is the total length of the instructional day, including independent study, not longer than 10 hours on average?
- Are ratios for students/instructors/trucks appropriate in order to meet the standards?
- Do instructors use lesson plans to guide each session?
- Do students practice driving under various roadway and traffic conditions?

STUDENT EVALUATION & TESTING

- Do tests assess knowledge, skills and proficiency?
- Does a student have to successfully complete the course equivalent to PTDI content and hours, including tests and road tests, and obtain a CDL before graduation?

OUTCOMES & RECORDS

- Do files contain all required components?
- Do student records document all instructional time that a student receives?

Q. Do the standards require 104 hours of classroom time?

A. The standards require a minimum 104 hours of a combination of classroom and lab time. Lab time includes such activities as pre-trip inspections, instructor demonstrations and simulator training. Also, up to one third of classroom time may be properly documented independent study (which is not the same as homework.)

Q. How much is the certification fee?

A. The cost of initial certification is \$3,295. During each subsequent year of certification an annual fee of \$750 is due with an annual report.

Q. Is there a break for certifying courses at additional locations of my school?

A. For each additional permanent location of a school that already has a PTDI-certified course, the initial certification fee is only \$2,250. During each subsequent year of certification an annual fee of \$500 is due with an annual report.

Q. Are there other costs associated with PTDI certification?

A. The school must provide sufficient instructors to maintain instructors to students to vehicle ratios to meet the standards. They must also maintain records to document training. Up-to-date materials and equipment must be used. The school purchases PTDI Certificates or Seals of Attainment to issue to all graduates who meet the requirements of PTDI and the school.

Q. What are the steps of the certification/recertification process?

A. In brief, the school reviews the standards and decides to apply for certification. Upon receipt of the application, PTDI sends the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) package to the school. A PTDI consultant conducts an hour-long conference call with the school's representative(s) to help them get started on the SER. After PTDI reviews the SER, an on-site visit is scheduled. A team of three (initial visits) or two (recertification visits) PTDI representatives review records and materials and observe classes in session to verify compliance with the PTDI standards. All submitted materials then go to the Certification Committee for review. The Committee will certify the course (with or without stipulations) for five years, defer certification or deny certification.

Q. How long does the certification process take?

A. If everything goes smoothly, it takes about six months from the time PTDI receives the application until the Certification Committee meets.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Q. How were PTDI Standards developed?

A. When TCA assumed management of PTDI, in 1996 it knew that it had to invite all the stakeholders in truck driver training to become involved in the revitalization of the organization. The stakeholders included schools, trucking companies, insurance companies, drivers, funding organizations, and regulatory organizations. The standards were developed with a four-step process. This history is under "About PTDI" at www.ptdi.org. A thorough review and update of the Entry-Level Skill, Curriculum and Certification Standards will be completed in early 2010.

Q. Who serves on the PTDI Board of Directors?

A. Representatives from publicly-funded schools, private institutions, carrier truck schools, insurance companies, carriers, and others with an interest in truck driver training. PTDI endeavors to maintain a balance of representation among entities.

Q. A school claims that they meet or exceed PTDI standards but do not have a PTDI-certified course. Can they do this?

A. No. A School cannot legitimately claim to meet or exceed PTDI standards because PTDI has not verified that they are doing so.

Q. If a school uses materials that they claim meets PTDI standards, can the school say they meet PTDI standards.

A. No. There are many more requirements to meet than the curriculum materials used to verify that a school is meeting PTDI standards.

Q. Can anyone be a “member” of PTDI or “belong” to PTDI?

A. No. PTDI is a standards-setting and certification body, not a membership organization. It does not, therefore, have members.

- Schools have “PTDI-certified courses”
- Board, Certification Commission and Committee members “serve on the PTDI Board, Certification Commission or Committee” and
- Drivers “graduate from a PTDI-certified course.”
- None of these “belong to” or are “members” of PTDI.