

DOT Driver Qualification Files

Businesses that are regulated by the Department of Transportation (DOT) must maintain a driver qualification (DQ) file. Driver qualifications are required for all interstate drivers who operate a vehicle with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) or a gross combination weight rating (GCWR) of 10,001 pounds or more.

DQ files hold records and documents that ensure the employee meets the safety and health qualifications necessary to operate a commercial motor vehicle (CMV). This includes owner-operators, as they're considered both employers and employees.

While building and maintaining DQ files is time consuming, compliance is required by the DOT. There are many online resources available to manage your DQ file process. The main goal is to make sure your DQ files are always compliant and up to date. Failing to maintain DQ files can trigger fines or audits, and can even lead to your business being placed out of service.

Since all motor carriers must maintain a DQ file for each employed driver, a checklist may help ensure all required documents and inquiries are obtained. A description of the documents required for each driver's qualification file is included in the following subsections and in 49 CFR 391.51, which also details the document retention requirements.

What's required in a DQ file?

- Driver's application for employment
- Inquiry to previous employers — driving record for last three years
- Annual inquiry and review of driving record
- Annual driver's certification of violations and annual review
- Driver's road test and certificate, or the equivalent to the road test
- Medical examiner's certificate
- If granted, a waiver of physical disqualification for a person with a loss or impairment of limbs as specified in § 391.49

Intrastate non-CDL drivers may have different criteria based on vehicle weight because state regulations sometimes differ from Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) regulations. For example, states may have different weight limits than those set by the FMCSA or may exempt certain drivers from some DQ file requirements. Contact the state agency that regulates commercial motor vehicles to find out what rules apply in your state.

How long should these records be kept?

Length of record retention requirements for some of the most common records vary. While you should refer to FMCSA's regulations for the most detailed and up-to-date information, here are some basic guidelines:

- Driver qualification files – for as long as the driver is employed and for three years thereafter
- Within the DQ files, these items may be removed after 36 months:
 - o Motor vehicle records (MVR) associated with the annual review
 - o Certificate of violations
 - o Annual review
 - o Medical examiner's certificate
 - o National registry note
 - o MVR associated with the medical card

This checklist will help you ensure that each DQ file is complete.