

Emergency Declaration Information

Relief from Federal safety regulations is limited to a maximum of 30 days, unless extended by FMCSA itself. In order to be in full compliance with all declarations, be sure to read the definitions of "emergency" and "emergency relief."

§390.5 Definitions.

Emergency means any hurricane, tornado, storm (e.g. thunderstorm, snowstorm, icestorm, blizzard, sandstorm, etc.), high water, wind driven water, tidal wave, tsunami, earthquake, volcanic eruption, mud slide, drought, forest fire, explosion, blackout or other occurrence, natural or man made, which interrupts the delivery of essential services (such as, electricity, medical care, sewer, water, telecommunications, and telecommunication transmissions) or essential supplies (such as, food and fuel) or otherwise immediately threatens human life or public welfare, provided such hurricane, tornado or other event results in:

- (1) A declaration of an emergency by the President of the United States, the Governor of a State, or their authorized representatives having authority to declare emergencies; by the FMCSA Field Administrator Director of Motor Carriers for the geographical area in which the occurrence happens; or by other Federal, State or local government officials having authority to declare emergencies; or
- (2) A request by a police officer for tow trucks to move wrecked or disabled motor vehicles.

Emergency relief means an operation in which a motor carrier or driver of a commercial motor vehicle is providing direct assistance to supplement State and local efforts and capabilities to save lives or property or to protect public health and safety as a result of an emergency as defined in this section.

Temporary suspension from HOS and other safety regulations

Federal regulations (CFR 49 Part 390.23) allow the temporary lifting of certain safety regulations for any motor carrier or driver providing direct assistance in relief during a declared emergency. This includes easing the HOS regulations for drivers. However, regulations do not allow FMCSA to suspend requirements for CDL, drug and alcohol testing or motor carrier financial responsibility (insurance).

Subpart B - General requirements and information

§ 390.23 Relief from regulations.

(a) Parts 390 through 399 of this chapter shall not apply to any motor carrier or driver operating a commercial motor vehicle to provide emergency relief during an emergency, subject to the following time limits:

(1) Regional emergencies. (i) The exemption provided by paragraph (a)(1) of this section is effective only when:

(A) An emergency has been declared by the President of the United States, the Governor of a State, or their authorized representatives having authority to declare emergencies; or

(B) The FMCSA Field Administrator has declared that a regional emergency exists which justifies an exemption from parts 390 through 399 of this chapter.

(ii) Except as provided in §390.25, this exemption shall not exceed the duration of the motor carrier's or driver's direct assistance in providing emergency relief, or 30 days from the date of the initial declaration of the emergency or the exemption from the regulations by the FMCSA Field Administrator, whichever is less.

(2) Local emergencies. (i) The exemption provided by paragraph (a)(2) of this section is effective only when:

(A) An emergency has been declared by a Federal, State or local government official having authority to declare an emergency; or

(B) The FMCSA Field Administrator has declared that a local emergency exists which justifies an exemption from parts 390 through 399 of this chapter.

(ii) This exemption shall not exceed the duration of the motor carrier's or driver's direct assistance in providing emergency relief, or 5 days from the date of the initial declaration of the emergency or the exemption from the regulations by the FMCSA Field Administrator, whichever is less.

(3) Tow trucks responding to emergencies.

(i) The exemption provided by paragraph (a)(3) of this section is effective only when a request has been made by a Federal, State or local police officer for tow trucks to move wrecked or disabled motor vehicles.

(ii) This exemption shall not exceed the length of the motor carrier's or driver's direct assistance in providing emergency relief, or 24 hours from the time of the initial request for assistance by the Federal, State or local police officer, whichever is less.

(b) Upon termination of direct assistance to the regional or local emergency relief effort, the motor carrier or driver is subject to the requirements of parts 390 through 399 of this chapter, with the following exception: A driver may return empty to the motor carrier's terminal or the driver's normal work reporting location without complying with parts 390 through 399 of this chapter. However, a driver who informs the motor carrier that he or she needs immediate rest must be permitted at least 10 consecutive hours off duty before the driver is required to return to such terminal or location. Having returned to the terminal or other location, the driver must be relieved of all duty and responsibilities. Direct assistance terminates when a driver or commercial motor vehicle is used in interstate commerce to transport cargo not destined for the emergency relief effort, or when the motor carrier dispatches such driver or commercial motor vehicle to another location to begin operations in commerce.

(c) When the driver has been relieved of all duty and responsibilities upon termination of direct assistance to a regional or local emergency relief effort, no motor carrier shall permit or require any driver used by it to drive nor shall any such driver drive in commerce until:

(1) The driver has met the requirements of §§395.3(a) and 395.5(a) of this chapter; and

(2) The driver has had at least 34 consecutive hours off-duty when:

(i) The driver has been on duty for more than 60 hours in any 7 consecutive days at the time the driver is relieved of all duty if the employing motor carrier does not operate every day in the week, or

(ii) The driver has been on duty for more than 70 hours in any 8 consecutive days at the time the driver is relieved of all duty if the employing motor carrier operates every day in the week.