

# Transportation Department targets 3,000 truck driving schools for non-compliance

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By JOSH FUNK

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## Federal review finds 44% of US trucking schools don't comply with government rules



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A student driver gets on a truck as the instructor watches in Calif., Nov. 15, 2021. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong, File)



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A student truck driver makes flash cards for his commercial driver's license exam while taking a class in Calif., Nov. 15, 2021. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong, File)



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Harjinder Singh is escorted onto an airplane by Florida Lt. Gov. Jay Collins and law enforcement on Thursday, Aug. 21, 2025, in Stockton, Calif. (AP Photo/Benjamin Fanjoy, file)

Nearly 44% of the 16,000 truck driving programs listed nationwide by the government may be forced to close if they lose their students after a review by the federal Transportation Department found they may not be complying with minimum requirements.

The Transportation Department said Monday that it plans to revoke the certification of nearly 3,000 schools unless they can comply with training requirements in the next 30 days. The targeted schools must notify students that their certification is in jeopardy. Another 4,500 schools are being warned they may face similar action.

Schools that lose certification will no longer be able to issue the certificates showing a driver completed training that's required to get a license, so students are likely to abandon those schools. It's not clear how many of those schools have been actively teaching students.

Separately, the Department of Homeland Security is auditing trucking firms in California owned by immigrants to verify the status of their drivers and whether they are qualified to hold a commercial driver's license.

This crackdown on trucking schools and companies is the latest step in the government's effort to ensure that truck drivers are qualified and eligible to hold a commercial license. This began after a truck driver that Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy says was not authorized to be in the U.S. made an illegal U-turn and caused a crash in Florida that killed three people.

The action reins in "illegal and reckless practices that let poorly trained drivers get behind the wheel of semi-trucks and school buses," Duffy said.

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Duffy has threatened to pull federal funding from California and Pennsylvania over the issue, and he proposed significant new restrictions on which immigrants can get a commercial driver's license but a court put those new rules on hold. On Monday, he threatened to withhold \$30.4 million from Minnesota if that state doesn't address shortcomings in its commercial driver's license program and revoke any licenses that never should have been issued either because they were valid beyond a driver's work permit or because the state never verified a driver's immigration status.

So far, every state Duffy has threatened has been a Democratic state, but he has said the department is auditing a number of other states, including Texas and South Dakota.

Claire Lancaster, a spokesperson for Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, said: “We take safety on our roads seriously and the Minnesota Department of Public Safety has already worked to ensure we are in compliance with federal law.”

## Trucking schools fail to meet standards

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It’s not clear how action against these trucking schools could affect the existing shortage of drivers, but the executive director of the largest association of trucking schools, Andrew Poliakoff, said many of the schools being decertified were questionable “CDL mills” that would advertise being able to train drivers in just a few days.

In established training schools, students normally spend at least a month and get lessons both behind the wheel and in the classroom.

He said those questionable schools were really just “fleecing people out of money” without teaching them the skills they need to get hired or pass the test.

“Trucking is an outstanding career. And the people who are not familiar with the industry might see someone charging \$1,000 in \$2,000 for a long weekend or quick training. And they may think that that’s desirable, but that’s really not,” said Poliakoff, who leads the Commercial Vehicle Training Association that includes 100 schools with 400 locations nationwide. None of those schools were decertified.

The Transportation Department said the 3,000 schools it is taking action against failed to meet training standards and didn’t maintain accurate and complete records. The schools are also accused of falsifying or manipulating training data.

Some of them were inactive before this action.

Yogi Sanwal, the owner, said his company closed its truck driving school in 2022. It did so after it made some changes to comply with federal accreditation requirements, which then triggered a county government demand for upgrades like replacing sand and gravel with asphalt. The company didn’t have the \$150,000 it would have needed to do that at the time so it closed the school. It had trained about 500 truckers in the four to five years the school was open, Sanwal said.

Trucking industry groups have praised the effort to tighten up licensing standards and ensure that drivers can meet basic English proficiency requirements the Trump administration began enforcing this summer. But groups that represent immigrant truck drivers say they believe many qualified drivers and companies are being targeted simply because of their citizenship status.

“Bad actors who exploit loopholes in our regulatory systems are putting everyone at risk. This is unacceptable,” said Paul J. Enos, CEO of the Nevada Trucking Association. “We are focused on solutions and resolute on seeing them implemented.”

Todd Spencer, President of the Owner Operator Independent Drivers Association, said the industry has long warned about the potential for problems if trucking schools are allowed to certify themselves.

“When training standards are weak, or in some instances totally non-existent, drivers are unprepared, and everyone on the road pays the price,” Spencer said.

## **Immigrant drivers say they are being unfairly targeted**

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Truck drivers of the Sikh faith have been caught in the crossfire and faced harassment because the drivers in the Florida crash and another deadly crash in California this fall were both Sikhs. The North American Punjabi Truckers Association estimates that the Sikh workforce makes up about 40% of truck driving on the West Coast and about 20% nationwide. Advocacy groups estimate about 150,000 Sikh truck drivers work in the U.S.

The Department of Homeland Security didn't respond immediately to questions about the effort to verify the immigration status of truck drivers, but the UNITED SIKHS advocacy group said they have heard directly from Punjabi company owners about these aggressive audits of immigration records.

“Sikh and immigrant truckers with spotless records are being treated like suspects while they keep America's freight moving,” the UNITED SIKHS group said. “When federal agencies frame lawful, licensed drivers as risks, it doesn't improve safety — it fuels xenophobia, harassment, and even violence on the road. Any policy built on fear instead of facts endangers families, civil rights, and the national supply chain.”

California moved to revoke 17,000 commercial driver's licenses after federal officials raised concerns that they had been issued improperly to immigrants or allowed to remain valid long after a driver's work permit expired.

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AP writer Audrey McAvoy contributed to this story.