



NTSB 2017–2018 MOST WANTED LIST OF TRANSPORTATION SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

Require Medical Fitness



MARINE

MWL
MOST WANTED LIST



What is the issue?

When safety-critical personnel, such as public vehicle operators, have untreated medical conditions that prevent them from doing their jobs effectively, people can be seriously injured or even die. Requiring medical fitness for duty can prevent accidents leading to these and other tragic outcomes.

Medical conditions and treatments for conditions that may impair transportation professionals must be better understood. Although it has long been recognized that untreated and undiagnosed medical conditions pose a safety risk to the traveling public, medical certification for safety critical personnel remains varied across the modes of transportation. For instance, medical certifications for railroad engineers are renewed every 3 years, and they cover only vision and hearing standards. On the other hand, the US Coast Guard requires commercial vessel crews to get comprehensive medical exams at regular intervals, but relies on mariners to self-report medical conditions and medication use. The aviation medical certification system may be the most robust, but pilots are increasingly testing positive for over-the-counter sedating medications.

Moreover, although we have found that obstructive sleep apnea was a factor in multiple accidents, most transportation modes still lack a complete screening process for this condition.

What can be done?

Operating complex machines requires the full cognitive and physical capabilities of the operators, maintenance personnel, and others performing safety-critical functions. Ensuring these individuals comply with requirements to report to work medically fit for duty is essential.

We have made recommendations for a comprehensive medical certification system for safety critical transportation personnel that includes these features:

- the applicant's complete medical history, taken at prescribed intervals, that includes medications, conditions, and treatments as well as a physical examination;
- specific historical questions and physical examination procedures to identify applicants at high risk for sleep disorders;
- identification of specific conditions, treatments, and medications that initially disqualify applicants for

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- duty, with certification contingent on further testing (specific to each condition);
- explicit and uniform processes and criteria for determining when the applicant has a treated, but otherwise disqualifying, condition;
 - certificates that are good only for a limited time for applicants with conditions that are currently stable but known to be likely to deteriorate, to ensure appropriate retesting;
 - medical examiners who:
 - are licensed or registered to perform examinations and prescribe medication in a given state;
 - are specifically trained and certified to perform medical certification exams; and
 - have ready access to information regarding disqualifying conditions that require further evaluation.
 - a review system for medical examiners' work products with the information and capacity to identify and correct errors and substandard performance;
 - the capacity to prevent applicants who have been deferred or denied certification from finding another provider who will certify them;
 - a process for dealing with conditions that could impair safety and are diagnosed between certification exams; and
 - guidance for medical providers that should be used when the provider believes a medical condition disqualifies an individual for duty.

The goal is simple: **ensure safety-critical professionals are medically fit for duty before they operate a vehicle.** ■

The NTSB Most Wanted List highlights safety issues identified from the NTSB's accident investigations to increase awareness about the issues and promote recommended safety solutions.

The NTSB is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant accidents in other modes of transportation – railroad, highway, marine and pipeline. The NTSB determines the probable cause of the accidents and issues safety recommendations aimed at preventing future accidents. In addition, the NTSB carries out special studies concerning transportation safety and coordinates the resources of the federal government and other organizations to provide assistance to victims and their family members impacted by major transportation disasters.

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Related Accidents*

Date	Location	Accident ID
June 20, 1997	Lynn Canal, AK	DCA95MM045
November 7, 2007	San Francisco, CA	DCA08MM004

*For detailed accident reports visit www.nts.gov

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**Critical changes
 needed to reduce
 transportation
 accidents and
 save lives.**

