

Regulatory Compliance Bulletin

Hazardous Materials Training Requirements

April 9, 2026

Hazardous materials training requirements derive from the Federal Hazardous Materials Transportation Law, 49 U.S.C. § 5101 et seq., which authorizes the Secretary of Transportation to regulate the safe transportation of hazardous materials in commerce. The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) implements this authority through the Hazardous Materials Regulations (HMR) at 49 C.F.R. Parts 171–180, with training obligations specifically established under 49 C.F.R. §§ 172.700–172.704.

PHMSA has published a comprehensive set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) clarifying training obligations based on historical letters of interpretation. The FAQs address who must be trained, what training must cover, how often it must occur, and the consequences of non-compliance. EMA members engaged in fuel transportation and distribution should review the following summary.

Who Is Covered

The HMR applies broadly. A "hazmat employee" under § 171.8 includes any person who — in the course of employment — directly affects hazmat transportation safety. This covers loading, unloading, and handling of hazardous materials; inspecting packaging; preparing shipments; operating transport vehicles; and anyone with responsibility for transportation safety. A "hazmat employer" is any person who uses hazmat employees in commerce or who is involved in the design, manufacture, inspection, or maintenance of hazmat containers and packaging. Subcontractors are not exempt — the subcontractor, as the hazmat employer for its own employees, bears primary responsibility for their training compliance.

What Training Must Cover

A compliant hazmat training program must include five components: general awareness and familiarization with the HMR; function-specific training tailored to the employee's actual job duties; safety training covering emergency response, self-protection, and accident prevention; security awareness training; and in-depth security training where a security plan is required. Additionally, modal-specific training is required for each mode of transportation in which the employee operates.

Flexibility in Delivery

The HMR is performance-based and flexible in how training is delivered. Employers may conduct training in-house, employees may self-train, or a third-party training provider may be

used — provided all requirements under Subpart H to Part 172 are satisfied. Online, computer-based, and virtual training formats are all explicitly authorized. Training completed to satisfy OSHA or EPA hazard communication requirements may also count toward HMR training obligations to the extent it addresses the required components — duplication is not necessary.

Testing and Recordkeeping

Some form of testing is required — written, oral, or demonstration — to verify that each employee can competently perform their assigned duties. Passing a test alone does not waive the training requirement itself. Employers must maintain training records for each hazmat employee that include the employee's name, the date of most recently completed training, a description of training materials used, the trainer's name and address, and a certification of compliance. These records must be retained regardless of who delivered the training.

Recurrent Training and Job Changes

Training must be completed at least once every three years. When an employee changes job functions or when PHMSA amends a regulation applicable to functions performed by the employee, additional training is required — without regard to where the employee falls in the three-year cycle. New employees or those changing roles must complete training within 90 days, though they may perform duties prior to completion under direct supervision of a properly trained employee.

CDL Hazmat Endorsements

Holding a CDL with a hazmat endorsement does not satisfy or replace HMR training requirements. Drivers remain subject to the full training requirements of Subpart H to Part 172, though training completed to obtain the endorsement may satisfy some components to the extent it covers the required subject matter.

Penalties

Non-compliance carries significant financial exposure. Civil penalties for knowing violations of the HMR can reach up to \$99,756 per violation, increasing to \$232,762 where a violation results in death, serious illness, severe injury, or substantial property damage. A minimum penalty of \$601 applies specifically to training violations. These figures are adjusted annually for inflation.

For questions, contact EMA regulatory counsel Jeff Leiter (jleiter@bmalaw.net) and Jorge Roman (jroman@bmalaw.net).

Click here for the full PHMSA FAQ: <https://www.phmsa.dot.gov/about-phmsa/hazardous-materials-training-requirements>