

UPCOMING TRAININGS & CONFERENCES

A full list of NDAA's virtual learning sessions is available at ndaa.org/training-courses/.

NDAA's Mastering Masking Digital Course/ On Demand Training (CLE Available)
ndaa.org/training/mastering-masking-2/

NDAA's Human Trafficking and the Impact on Commercial Driver's Licenses/On Demand Training
ndaa.org/training/human-trafficking-and-the-impact-on-commercial-drivers-licenses/

NDAA's Prosecuting DUI Cases Online Course/ On Demand Training (CLE Available)
ndaa.org/training/prosecuting-dui-cases/

NDAA's Investigation and Prosecution of Drug-Impaired Driving Cases Online Course/On Demand Training (CLE Available)
ndaa.org/training/on-demand-learning-investigation-and-prosecution-of-drug-impaired-driving-cases/

Prosecuting Child Sexual Assault (Virtual Conference)
 September 27-28, 2023 @ 12:00-4:45 p.m. ET

Key Insights for DAs Presenting Video Evidence (Live Web Event)
 October 12, 2023 @ 2:00-3:00 p.m. ET
Free Event Sponsored by Axon

RESOURCES

Impaired Driving Resources
ndaa.org/programs/ntl/

CDL-Related Resources
ndaa.org/programs/ntl/commercial-drivers-license/

NDAA STAFF

Executive Director Nelson O. Bunn, Jr.	Chief Operating Officer Christine Mica
Vice President, Education & Engagement Lorena Vollrath-Bueno	

THE NATIONAL TRAFFIC LAW CENTER

Director Joanne E. Thomka	jthomka@ndaajustice.org
Senior Attorneys M. Kimberly Brown Jim Camp	mkbrown@ndaajustice.org jcamp@ndaajustice.org
Staff Attorneys Erin Inman Bella Truong	einman@ndaajustice.org btruong@ndaajustice.org

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CMV Enforcement in Small Town U.S.A.

By Chief Charles Williams, City of Belle Meade (TN) Police Department

Enforcing traffic laws against a commercial motor vehicle (CMV) can be intimidating to a small community police officer, especially for one who has not received CMV or commercial driver's license (CDL)-related special training. As an officer myself, I faced a similar sense of fear when it came to CMV and CDL enforcement, a challenge shared by many local law enforcement officers without specific training in this area.

In the early stages of my career, my training officer imparted a distinct message: commercial motor vehicles and drivers with CDLs operated under an entirely separate set of rules. He advised me to leave CMV violations to the Highway Patrol, emphasizing that my focus should be squarely on passenger vehicles. I didn't contest or question his guidance; his seniority and experience spoke volumes. Consequently, I showed great leniency when addressing CDL and CMV infractions.

Fast forward two decades, and I now hold the position of Chief of Police for the Belle Meade, TN Police Department—a role that presents unique challenges due to the town’s characteristics. Belle Meade, spanning just 3.1 square miles, lies adjacent to Nashville, steeped in history, and predominantly composed of residential housing.

Imagine my bewilderment when our residents consistently complained about the influx of commercial traffic coming through our community. Unbeknownst to me, the “Nashville Boom” had cast its shadow on us, turning our town into a favored shortcut for dump trucks, concrete mixers, and similar vehicles. Concerns arose among community leaders, fearing that the weight of these trucks would take a toll on our roads. It became evident that most CDL holders operating CMVs paid little heed to the posted weight limits on our cherished historic bridge and city streets.

My limited familiarity with CMVs, CDLs, and the laws and regulations surrounding them, prompted me to recognize the need for expertise beyond our own. This led me to approach the seasoned troopers of the Tennessee Highway Patrol (THP), who are well-versed in CDL/CMV enforcement. We discussed our concerns, objectives, and ultimately decided that collaboration would be mutually beneficial. The troopers agreed to provide training for our officers, focusing on prevalent CMV violations and safe protocols for conducting stops. It became abundantly clear that typical traffic violations took on a heightened level of risk when committed by CDL holders operating CMVs. The sheer mass and destructive potential of these vehicles necessitated a nuanced approach to enforcement. Thus, we devised a comprehensive strategy involving a concentrated presence of our officers alongside THP Sgt. Adam Grinder. I had the privilege of riding along with Sgt. Grinder, observing as he skillfully stopped CMVs for traffic infractions. The volume of observed and enforced violations amazed me, defying expectations given our town’s modest size.

Typical traffic violations take on a heightened level of risk when committed by CDL holders operating CMVs.

In a mere four hours, we had documented a substantial number of violations and taken several vehicles out of operation. The most prevalent offenses centered on unsecured loads and faulty equipment. The revelations were astounding—for example, never had I imagined that numerous and potentially hazardous CMVs would operate with such compromised tire conditions. We’re all familiar with the tire debris scattered along highways, indicative of insufficient maintenance standards. It became clear that vehicle maintenance was not a significant concern for certain trucking companies we encountered. In one notable instance, a CMV driver transporting rock, lacked a valid CDL and displayed significant equipment problems. Consequently, the vehicle was immediately rendered inoperative, and the driver received a series of citations. As our efforts unfolded, and the number of stopped CMVs and CDL citations grew, local trucking companies reached out to our city hall inquiring about necessary permits to access our city.

The most enlightening revelation of this experience, however, was learning the numerous violations we encountered could be addressed at our local level. Armed with a comprehensive list of applicable laws, our officers realized the breadth of CMV/CDL infractions they could enforce without further specialized training. Knowing we possessed the capability to address these violations independently was indeed surprising. We continued our saturation efforts on a weekly basis for approximately a month, each endeavor yielding remarkable success.

Swiftly building upon Sgt. Grinder’s guidance, we embarked on a comprehensive training regimen that armed each of our officers with the knowledge and tools required to confidently address the various violations regularly occurring in our community. These violations, particularly when committed while operating a CMV, significantly heighten the risks to the safety of other road users. It is essential to note that, thanks to Sgt. Grinder’s training and my participation in the National Traffic Law Center’s National CDL Conference, we now understand that Federal Regulations mandate accountability for CDL holders regarding their driving conduct, even when they are not operating a CMV. These regulations strictly forbid the dismissal, amendment, deferral, or diversion of traffic violations committed by CDL holders, thereby ensuring the comprehensive maintenance of records for these highly specialized, professional drivers.

CMV Enforcement in Small Town U.S.A.

Following several months of unwavering enforcement, our stakeholders have reported minimal complaints about the commercial vehicle traffic within our city. In the pre-enforcement era, a significant portion of CMV-related crashes stemmed from improper adherence to regulations. Reports of debris falling from vehicles and causing windshield damage, including to our own patrol cars, had also become all too common. However, our dedication to high-visibility enforcement has rewritten the narrative—crashes involving CMVs are now conspicuously absent, and not a single report of windshield damage has surfaced since the campaign's inception.

The resounding lesson learned is this: as the largest and most potentially perilous vehicles on our roads, CMVs wield their impact across all settings—from bustling interstates to quiet suburban lanes. It is incumbent upon all law enforcement officers, including small town officers, to ensure accountability for CDL holders' bad driving behavior. This responsibility cannot be dismissed. To ignore such violations is to forsake our solemn duty to ensure the well-being of the innocent residents who traverse these shared roads alongside CMVs. Our community's safety has been distinctly enhanced through our resolute commitment to this mission and this enforcement practice will continue.

About the Author

City of Belle Meade (TN) Police Chief Charles Williams has over twenty years of law enforcement experience and has served the Belle Meade Police Department for the last thirteen years. He rose from patrol officer to Chief of Police, following his promotion from patrol sergeant in 2020. With a degree from Bethel University and specialized police certifications, Chief Williams embodies a wealth of knowledge and expertise. His multifaceted background highlights his commitment to professional growth and unwavering dedication to the communities he serves.



NEW NTLC On-Demand Webinar



Impaired Driving by CDL Holders

Please visit NDAA's Learning Management System for our new on-demand webinar, [Impaired Driving by CDL Holders](#). Explore the serious implications of DUI offenses for commercial drivers, including the potential licensing consequences and the complex issue of masking charges. Delve into the legal, professional, and ethical aspects surrounding this critical topic, raising awareness and promoting responsible driving practices in the commercial sector.

For additional information relating to Commercial Driver's Licenses and the consequences of masking, please contact NTLC Senior Attorney [Jim Camp](#) or Staff Attorney [Bella Truong](#).