The Complete Guide to Starting Your Trucking Company

Starting a trucking company requires strict adherence to federal and state regulations. This guide walks you through the exact sequential steps you must take to get your business legally established, fully compliant, and ready to haul.

Phase 1: The Foundation

Before filing any legal paperwork, you must establish the professional identity of your business.

Step 1: Desired Company Name, Email, Address, and Phone

- **Company Name:** Choose a unique business name. You must verify with your state's Secretary of State website that the name is not already taken by another registered business.
- **Business Address:** Decide on a physical address. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) does not allow P.O. Boxes for your principal place of business. You must use a physical street address.
- **Contact Information:** Set up a dedicated professional business email (e.g., dispatch@yourcompany.com) and a dedicated business phone number.

Phase 2: Formalizing the Business

With your foundation set, it is time to make the company a legal and financial reality.

Step 2a: Setup Corp / LLC with the State

- File your Articles of Organization (for an LLC) or Articles of Incorporation (for a Corporation) with your state's Secretary of State.
- Designate a Registered Agent (a person or service authorized to receive legal mail on behalf of your business).
- Pay the state filing fee, which varies depending on your jurisdiction.

Step 2b: Apply for EIN with the IRS

- Once your state approves your LLC or Corporation, go to the official IRS website and apply for an Employer Identification Number (EIN).
- **Purpose:** This nine-digit number acts like a Social Security Number for your business and is required for tax purposes, hiring employees, and opening a bank account.

Step 2c: Open a Business Bank Account

Never mix personal and business finances. Take your approved state business formation documents and your new IRS EIN to a bank to open a dedicated commercial checking account. This account will be used to pay for equipment, insurance, and operating expenses, and where you will deposit your freight earnings.

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Phase 3: Operating Authority & Insurance

This is the most critical regulatory phase. You must obtain permission from the federal government to haul freight.

Step 3a: Apply for DOT & MC Numbers & File BOC3

- **USDOT Number:** A unique identifier used to collect and monitor your company's safety information.
- **MC Number (Motor Carrier Authority):** Required if you are crossing state lines (interstate commerce) for hire. Apply via the FMCSA Unified Registration System (URS).
- **BOC3 Filing:** Hire a blanket agent company to file Form BOC3 on your behalf. This designates a legal representative in all 50 states who can receive legal documents for you.

Step 3b: Get the Insurance on the Company

- FMCSA requires proof of commercial auto liability insurance before your MC Number is activated.
- **General Freight Minimums:** Coverage requirements vary by operation type and jurisdiction.
- **Cargo Insurance:** While not always federally mandated for every carrier type, brokers and shippers generally require cargo coverage before assigning loads.
- Your insurance provider must file the proper forms (BMC-91 or BMC-91X) directly with FMCSA.

State-Specific Insurance Compliance (CA/TX)

- **California (CA DMV 65 MCP / MC 65 M):** Your insurer must submit the required Motor Carrier Permit insurance proof directly to California systems.
- **Texas Equivalent Filing:** Texas insurance proof is typically satisfied through insurer-submitted state/federal filing pathways, commonly tied to MCS-90 or Form E style workflows where applicable.
- Keep submission confirmations and filing dates for both states in your compliance records.

Step 3c: The 21-Day Waiting Period

Crucial Rule: Once you apply for your MC number and file insurance, FMCSA places your application into a mandatory 21-day protest period. During this period, your company is not active. You cannot legally haul interstate freight until the waiting period clears and FMCSA issues your grant letter. Use this waiting window to complete Phases 4 and 5 in parallel.

Phase 4: Equipment Registration

While you wait for your authority to become active, you can get your truck legally plated.

Step 4a: IRS Form 2290 (HVUT)

- **HVUT (Heavy Vehicle Use Tax):** If your truck has a gross weight of 55,000 lbs or more, file and pay IRS Form 2290.
- Your state will require stamped proof of 2290 payment before issuing plates.

Step 4b: IRP Plates & Registration

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- **IRP (International Registration Plan):** If your truck operates interstate and weighs over 26,000 lbs, open an IRP account with your base state to get apportioned plates.
- Confirm your base jurisdiction requirements and plate issuance timeline before dispatch scheduling.

Phase 5: Final Compliance & Operations

Your truck is plated and your authority is nearing active status. Finalize road safety and tax compliance before dispatch.

Step 5a: Get State & Local Permits

- **IFTA:** Apply for an IFTA license and decals. This simplifies fuel tax reporting across jurisdictions.
- **State-Specific Weight/Distance Permits:** For states such as New York (NY HUT), Kentucky (KYU), New Mexico, or Oregon, obtain required travel permits.

Step 5b: Get Drug & Alcohol Consortium

- Federal law requires all CDL drivers to participate in a DOT-approved drug and alcohol testing program.
- Enroll in a Consortium/Third-Party Administrator (C/TPA) to manage your random testing pool.
- Register with the FMCSA Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse and run a pre-employment query on yourself (if you are the driver) and any hired drivers.

Step 5c: ELD Setup + PrePass Account

- **ELD Setup:** Configure your Electronic Logging Device account with driver profiles, vehicle assignments, and Hours of Service monitoring.
- **PrePass Account:** Activate your PrePass account to support smoother weigh-station and credential workflows where eligible.
- Completing these tools before dispatch reduces first-week delays and helps drivers operate with stronger compliance habits from day one.

Step 5d: Setup Travel Compliance Package

- **Electronic Logging Device (ELD):** Required for Hours of Service tracking.
- **Permit Book:** Keep Cab Card, IFTA license, active FMCSA authority, insurance certificate, and state permits in the truck.
- **Safety Equipment:** Include a mounted fire extinguisher and reflective emergency warning triangles.
- **Driver Qualification (DQ) File:** Maintain CDL, medical certificate, MVR, and road test certificate.

Final Milestone: Ready to Haul!

Ready-to-haul status is achieved only when the 21-day waiting period has cleared (day 22), insurance is active, and your permit-book/compliance checklist is complete. At that point, your truck is plated, your compliance package is in the cab, and your USDOT and MC numbers will show as ACTIVE in FMCSA systems. You are now legally cleared to book freight, negotiate with brokers, and hit the road.

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Need help with filings? Open Trucking Company can complete these steps for you end-to-end.

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