

Important information for tour organisers - changes to coach driver work and rest hours



From April 2007, there are major changes to the rules governing the work and rest patterns for coach drivers operating tours and hires throughout Europe. The changes will have a significant impact on the planning of tours in particular.

The Guild of British Coach Operators has produced this fact sheet to help tour organisers plan effectively.

Why are the rules changing?

The law affecting coach drivers' work is set by the European Union. The old rules had stood the test of time over 20 years but are not compatible with the new digital tachographs now being introduced, and the European Parliament wants to improve drivers' working conditions. Whether the new rules will actually achieve that objective is a moot point! But the rules ARE changing and we must all work within them.

When are they changing? The new rules come into effect from April 11, 2007.

Driving hours

There are no changes to the basic rule - drivers must take a break of 45 minutes after 4½ hours continuous driving. However, that break can be split into two - the first of 15 minutes and the second of 30 minutes. *The old provision for 3 separate breaks of 15 minutes is abolished.* Maximum driving remains 9 hours per day but this can be extended to 10 hours twice a week. Total weekly driving is limited to 56 hours per week and 90 hours per fortnight.

Daily rest

Normally this must be at least 11 hours, giving a maximum working day of 13 hours, but can be reduced to 9 hours not more than 3 times per week, to give a 15 hour day. Drivers of double manned coaches can be on duty for up to 21 hours.

Weekly rest

Here's where the big problem comes. In future, drivers will be required to take a weekly rest period after no more than 6 days' work. The existing so-called "12-day" rule is abolished. This means that one driver can no longer operate a tour of more than 6 days without taking a full weekly rest period (normally 45 hours, but this can be reduced to 24 hours once a fortnight provided the time is made up soon afterwards).

The special derogation for drivers working away from their home base is also being withdrawn.

During the rest period, the driver cannot undertake any work at all, so cannot act as a courier or perform any other duties for the tour party. They cannot even travel home, as this counts as "other work"!

Working with the new rules

Multi-day tours will be particularly affected. Some ways to manage the changes include:

- scheduling a "free" day during the tour when the coach and driver are not used;
- paying for an additional driver to travel out to meet the tour coach, either to cover so that the regular driver can take their weekly rest period at the destination, or else to allow the first driver to return to base within their working week to take their weekly rest.

Either way, the cost of operating multi-day tours will increase - through no fault of the coach operator!

Obligations of Tour Operators

The new rules make tour organisers jointly liable with the operator for planning schedules that meet the law.

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