

Building the Future Workforce

Advocating for a Balanced Approach to Training

Workforce Development: Support Industry-Specific Training Solutions

Workforce development is a critical challenge for the Lumber and Building Materials (LBM) industry. With the average worker now over **40 years old**, the pipeline for new talent is shrinking as increasing barriers to entry discourage prospective employees. Federal training requirements, while well-intentioned, often fail to align with the specific needs of the industry, leaving small businesses struggling to develop and retain a skilled workforce.

The LBM industry has a long history of supporting workforce development through **educational foundations** operated by its trade associations. These nonprofit entities offer a wide range of courses, training programs, and scholarships designed to help workers build fulfilling, lifelong careers in the industry. Additionally, many trade associations directly provide other training programs tailored to meet the evolving needs of their members and the broader workforce.

Despite these efforts, current regulations restrict the industry's ability to create **industry-specific training curricula** that can be delivered in both educational settings and on the job. Policymakers must amend these regulations to enable the LBM industry to fully leverage its expertise and infrastructure to address workforce challenges.

CDL Licensing (FMCSA Regulation: 49 CFR Part 380)

While Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) rules technically allow for employer-based CDL training programs, the requirements to establish these programs are far beyond the capacity of most small businesses. Employers must navigate complex accreditation processes, strict compliance regulations, and substantial equipment investments, which are unattainable for many independently owned LBM businesses operating on profit margins averaging just **5%**.

As a result, most employers are forced to send prospective drivers to commercial schools, where the cost of training has risen to approximately **\$8,000**—a stark increase from the **\$200** cost of on-the-job training that was previously allowed. This significant expense represents a prohibitive barrier for young workers and career changers seeking entry into the industry.

OSHA Crane Certification (OSHA Regulation: 29 CFR 1926 Subpart CC)

Similarly, current OSHA crane certification requirements focus on skills needed for operating large construction cranes, leaving workers unprepared for the operation of boom trucks, which are critical to the LBM industry. This misalignment results in costly, time-consuming training programs that provide little practical value for our employees' day-to-day responsibilities.

The Solution: Employer-Based Training Options

By expanding access to employer-based training programs, we can build on the success of the LBM industry's educational foundations and association-driven training initiatives. These programs will create meaningful career pathways that:

- **Lower barriers to entry**, making it easier for young workers and career changers to join the industry.
- **Provide on-the-job, industry-specific training**, ensuring relevance and immediate applicability.



- **Offer clear pathways to career advancement**, with wages that consistently exceed the minimum wage and opportunities for lifelong, well-paying careers.

These programs would empower LBM businesses and trade associations to design and execute training that is tailored to the specific needs of the industry, delivered both in traditional educational settings and through hands-on workplace learning.

The Workforce Crisis and Housing Affordability

The **American Trucking Associations (ATA)** estimates a nationwide shortage of **82,000 CDL drivers**, with projections for 2025 indicating that this gap will continue to grow as retirements outpace new workforce entries. This shortage directly impacts the LBM industry, which relies heavily on CDL drivers to transport building materials essential for construction.

A strained supply chain caused by a lack of CDL drivers leads to:

- **Increased costs for building materials**, as transportation challenges drive up delivery expenses.
- **Extended construction timelines**, as delays in material delivery slow down projects.
- **Higher housing costs**, as builders pass these increased expenses on to consumers, further exacerbating the affordability crisis.

The LBM industry supplies nearly all the materials required for construction, from framing lumber and roofing to drywall and cabinetry. Without sufficient CDL drivers to ensure timely delivery of these products, the supply chain falters, and the ripple effects are felt throughout the housing market. In a time when affordable housing is a critical need across the country, addressing this workforce crisis is essential to keeping construction costs manageable and projects on schedule.

ABMA's Call to Action

We urge policymakers to:

- **Amend current training regulations** to allow a mix of employer-driven, on-the-job training and formal education delivered through trade association educational foundations and other industry programs. These training initiatives would be vetted and approved by regulators to ensure safety, quality, and compliance.
- **Empower trade associations and their educational foundations** to expand workforce development programs, providing workers with the skills and knowledge needed to build lifelong, fulfilling careers in the LBM industry.
- **Reduce regulatory burdens** to enable small businesses and associations to act as key drivers of workforce development, fostering economic growth and addressing critical labor shortages.

The LBM industry has the experience, infrastructure, and commitment to develop and implement training programs that combine hands-on learning with formal education, ensuring workers are well-prepared for industry-specific challenges. By supporting these efforts, policymakers can help build a skilled workforce, ensuring the LBM industry can continue to supply affordable materials for housing and infrastructure across the nation.

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