

§ 552.5 Improperly filed petitions.

(a) A petition that is not addressed as specified in § 552.4, but that meets the other requirements of that section, will be treated as a properly filed petition, received as of the time it is discovered and identified.

(b) A document that fails to conform to one or more of the requirements of § 552.4(a) through (e) will not be treated as a petition under this part. Such a document will be treated according to the existing correspondence or other appropriate procedures of the NHTSA, and any suggestions contained in it will be considered at the discretion of the Administrator or his delegate.

§ 552.6 Technical review.

The appropriate Associate Administrator conducts a technical review of the petition. The technical review may consist of an analysis of the material submitted, together with information already in the possession of the agency. It may also include the collection of additional information, or a public meeting in accordance with § 552.7.

[60 FR 17267, Apr. 5, 1995]

§ 552.7 Public meeting.

If the Associate Administrator decides that a public meeting on the subject of the petition would contribute to the determination whether to commence a proceeding, he issues a notice of public meeting for publication in the FEDERAL REGISTER to advise interested persons of the time, place, and subject matter of the public meeting and invite their participation. Interested persons may submit their views and evidence through oral or written presentations, or both. There is no cross examination of witnesses. A transcript of the meeting is kept and exhibits may be accepted as part of the transcript. Sections 556 and 557 of title 5, U.S.C., do not apply to meetings held under this part. The Chief Counsel designates a member of his staff to serve as legal officer at the meeting.

§ 552.8 Notification of agency action on the petition.

After considering the technical review conducted under § 552.6, and taking into account appropriate factors,

which may include, among others, allocation of agency resources, agency priorities and the likelihood of success in litigation which might arise from the order, the Administrator will grant or deny the petition. NHTSA will notify the petitioner of the decision to grant or deny the petition within 120 days after its receipt of the petition.

[60 FR 17267, Apr. 5, 1995]

§ 552.9 Grant of petition.

(a) If a petition for rulemaking with respect to a motor vehicle safety standard is granted, a rulemaking proceeding is promptly commenced in accordance with applicable NHTSA and statutory procedures. The granting of such a petition and the commencement of a rulemaking proceeding does not signify, however, that the rule in question will be issued. A decision as to the issuance of the rule is made on the basis of all available information developed in the course of the rulemaking proceeding, in accordance with statutory criteria.

(b) If a petition with respect to a noncompliance or a defect is granted, a proceeding to determine the existence of the noncompliance or defect is promptly commenced by the initiation of an investigation by the Office of Standards Enforcement or the Office of Defects Investigation, as appropriate.

§ 552.10 Denial of petition.

If a petition is denied, a FEDERAL REGISTER notice of the denial is issued within 45 days of the denial, setting forth the reasons for denial of the petition.

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AUTHORITY: 49 U.S.C. 322, 1657, 30103, 30122, 30124, 30125, 30127, 30146, 30162, 32303, 32502, 32504, 32505, 32705, 32901, 32902, 33102, 33103, and 33107; delegation of authority at 49 CFR 1.50.

SOURCE: 60 FR 62222, Dec. 5, 1995, unless otherwise noted.

Subpart A—General

§ 553.1 Applicability.

This part prescribes rulemaking procedures that apply to the issuance, amendment, and revocation of rules pursuant to Title 49, Subtitle VI of the United States Code (49 U.S.C. 30101, *et seq.*).

§ 553.3 Definitions.

Administrator means the Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration or a person to whom he has delegated final authority in the matter concerned.

Rule includes any order, regulation, or Federal motor vehicle safety standard issued under Title 49.

Title 49 means 49 U.S.C. 30101, *et seq.*

§ 553.5 Regulatory docket.

(a) Information and data deemed relevant by the Administrator relating to rulemaking actions, including notices of proposed rulemaking; comments received in response to notices; petitions for rulemaking and reconsideration;

denials of petitions for rulemaking and reconsideration; records of additional rulemaking proceedings under § 553.25; and final rules are maintained in the Docket Room, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 400 Seventh Street SW., Washington, DC 20590.

(b) Any person may examine any docketed material at the Docket Room at any time during regular business hours after the docket is established, except material ordered withheld from the public under applicable provisions of Title 49 and section 552(b) of title 5 of the U.S.C., and may obtain a copy of it upon payment of a fee.

§ 553.7 Records.

Records of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration relating to rulemaking proceedings are available for inspection as provided in section 552(b) of title 5 of the U.S.C. and Part 7 of the regulations of the Secretary of Transportation (Part 7 of this title).

Subpart B—Procedures for Adoption of Rules

§ 553.11 Initiation of rulemaking.

The Administrator may initiate rulemaking either on his own motion or on petition by any interested person after a determination in accordance with Part 552 of this title that grant of the petition is advisable. The Administrator may, in his discretion, also consider the recommendations of other agencies of the United States.

§ 553.13 Notice of proposed rulemaking.

Unless the Administrator, for good cause, finds that notice is impracticable, unnecessary, or contrary to the public interest, and incorporates that finding and a brief statement of the reasons for it in the rule, a notice of proposed rulemaking is issued and interested persons are invited to participate in the rulemaking proceedings under applicable provisions of Title 49.

§ 553.15 Contents of notices of proposed rulemaking.

(a) Each notice of proposed rulemaking is published in the FEDERAL REGISTER, unless all persons subject to

it are named and are personally served with a copy of it.

(b) Each notice, whether published in the FEDERAL REGISTER or personally served, includes

(1) A statement of the time, place, and nature of the proposed rulemaking proceeding;

(2) A reference to the authority under which it is issued;

(3) A description of the subjects and issues involved or the substance and terms of the proposed rule;

(4) A statement of the time within which written comments must be submitted; and

(5) A statement of how and to what extent interested persons may participate in the proceedings.

§ 553.17 Participation of interested persons.

(a) Any interested person may participate in rulemaking proceeding by submitting comments in writing containing information, views or arguments.

(b) In his discretion, the Administrator may invite any interested person to participate in the rulemaking procedures described in § 553.25.

§ 553.19 Petitions for extension of time to comment.

A petition for extension of the time to submit comments must be received not later than 15 days before expiration of the time stated in the notice. The petitions must be submitted to: Administrator, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, 400 Seventh Street SW, Washington, DC, 20590. It is requested, but not required, that 10 copies be submitted. The filing of the petition does not automatically extend the time for petitioner's comments. Such a petition is granted only if the petitioner shows good cause for the extension, and if the extension is consistent with the public interest. If an extension is granted, it is granted to all persons, and it is published in the FEDERAL REGISTER.

§ 553.21 Contents of written comments.

All written comments shall be in English. Unless otherwise specified in a notice requesting comments, com-

ments may not exceed 15 pages in length, but necessary attachments may be appended to the submission without regard to the 15-page limit. Any interested person shall submit as a part of his written comments all material that he considers relevant to any statement of fact made by him. Incorporation by reference should be avoided. However, if incorporation by reference is necessary, the incorporated material shall be identified with respect to document and page. It is requested, but not required, that 10 copies and attachments, if any, be submitted.

§ 553.23 Consideration of comments received.

All timely comments are considered before final action is taken on a rulemaking proposal. Late filed comments may be considered as far as practicable.

§ 553.25 Additional rulemaking proceedings.

The Administrator may initiate any further rulemaking proceedings that he finds necessary or desirable. For example, interested persons may be invited to make oral arguments, to participate in conferences between the Administrator or his representative and interested persons at which minutes of the conference are kept, to appear at informal hearings presided over by officials designated by the Administrator, at which a transcript or minutes are kept, or participate in any other proceeding to assure informed administrative action and to protect the public interest.

§ 553.27 Hearings.

(a) Sections 556 and 557 of title 5, United States Code, do not apply to hearings held under this part. Unless otherwise specified, hearings held under this part are informal, non-adversary, fact-finding proceedings, at which there are no formal pleadings or adverse parties. Any rule issued in a case in which an informal hearing is held is not necessarily based exclusively on the record of the hearing.

(b) The Administrator designates a representative to conduct any hearing held under this part. The Chief Counsel designates a member of his staff to serve as legal officer at the hearing.

§ 553.29 Adoption of final rules.

Final rules are prepared by representatives of the office concerned and the Office of the Chief Counsel. The rule is then submitted to the Administrator for its consideration. If the Administrator adopts the rule, it is published in the FEDERAL REGISTER, unless all persons subject to it are named and are personally served with a copy of it.

§ 553.31–553.33 [Reserved]

§ 553.35 Petitions for reconsideration.

(a) Any interested person may petition the Administrator for reconsideration of any rule issued under this part. The petition shall be submitted to: Administrator, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 400 Seventh Street, SW, Washington, DC, 20590. It is requested, but not required, that 10 copies be submitted. The petition must be received not later than 45 days after publication of the rule in the FEDERAL REGISTER. Petitions filed after that time will be considered as petitions filed under Part 552 of this chapter. The petition must contain a brief statement of the complaint and an explanation as to why compliance with the rule is not practicable, is unreasonable, or is not in the public interest. Unless otherwise specified in the final rule, the statement and explanation together may not exceed 15 pages in length, but necessary attachments may be appended to the submission without regard to the 15-page limit.

(b) If the petitioner requests the consideration of additional facts, he must state the reason they were not presented to the Administrator within the prescribed time.

(c) The Administrator does not consider repetitious petitions.

(d) Unless the Administrator otherwise provides, the filing of a petition under this section does not stay the effectiveness of the rule.

§ 553.37 Proceedings on petitions for reconsideration.

The Administrator may grant or deny, in whole or in part, any petition for reconsideration without further proceedings. In the event he determines to reconsider any rule, he may

issue a final decision on reconsideration without further proceedings, or he may provide such opportunity to submit comment or information and data as he deems appropriate. Whenever the Administrator determines that a petition should be granted or denied, he prepares a notice of the grant or denial of a petition for reconsideration, for issuance to the petitioner, and issues it to the petitioner. The Administrator may consolidate petitions relating to the same rule.

§ 553.39 Effect of petition for reconsideration on time for seeking judicial review.

The filing of a timely petition for reconsideration of any rule issued under this part postpones the expiration of the statutory period in which to seek judicial review of that rule only as to the petitioner, and not as to other interested persons. For the petitioner, the period for seeking judicial review will commence at the time the agency takes final action upon the petition for reconsideration.

[60 FR 63651, Dec. 12, 1995]

APPENDIX A TO PART 553—STATEMENT OF POLICY: ACTION ON PETITIONS FOR RECONSIDERATION

It is the policy of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to issue notice of the action taken on a petition for reconsideration within 90 days after the closing date for receipt of such petitions, unless it is found impracticable to take action within that time. In cases where it is so found and the delay beyond that period is expected to be substantial, notice of that fact, and the date by which it is expected that action will be taken, will be published in the FEDERAL REGISTER.

APPENDIX B TO PART 553—STATEMENT OF POLICY: RULEMAKINGS INVOLVING THE ASSESSMENT OF THE FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENCE OF SAFETY STANDARDS

(a) Based on a comparison of the performance of vehicles or equipment, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) may tentatively determine that a foreign motor vehicle safety standard is better than or at least functionally equivalent to a Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS), either on its own motion or in connection with a petition for rulemaking by

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any interested party under 49 CFR Part 552. Such determinations will be made in accordance with the process described in the flowchart in Figure 1 of this Appendix.

(b) Under the process, if NHTSA decides that there is reason to believe that a foreign standard is better than or at least functionally equivalent to a FMVSS in accordance with the process, it will commence a rule-making proceeding that may lead to the issuance of a proposal to add the foreign standard as an alternative compliance option to the FMVSS, to harmonize the FMVSS with the foreign standard or to upgrade the FMVSS to the level of the foreign standard,

as appropriate. Such a proposal will request comment on the agency's tentative determination regarding relative benefits and functional equivalence as well as the proposed amendment. Final determinations regarding these matters will also be made in accordance with the analytical criteria in the flowchart.

(c) As used in this appendix, the term "standard" refers to mandatory requirements and thus has the same meaning given the term "technical regulation" in Annex 1 to the World Trade Organization Technical Barriers to Trade Agreement.

EXPLANATION OF FLOWCHART

A. ULTIMATE GOAL

The ultimate goal in comparing standards is to assess the real world safety performance of the covered vehicles or equipment. Particularly in the case of crashworthiness standards, the most reliable basis for making that assessment is fatality and injury data directly drawn from actual crashes. Accordingly, NHTSA will make appropriate efforts to ensure the availability of such data regarding crashes in the U.S.

B. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Best Practices

NHTSA pursues a “best practices” policy in comparing U.S. and foreign safety standards, i.e., NHTSA will propose to upgrade its standards if it tentatively concludes that a Country B standard offers greater benefits than the counterpart FMVSS, and if upgrading appears appropriate, considering the incremental costs and benefits and applicable statutory criteria. (For a discussion of another type of rulemaking proposal that may be considered in these circumstances, see the paragraph below on comparisons that indicate that a foreign standard’s safety benefits are greater than those of the counterpart FMVSS.)

Conservatism

1. NHTSA places priority on preserving the safety benefits of the FMVSSs.

2. NHTSA can best preserve those benefits by being conservative in reaching any conclusion that a Country B standard is better than or at least functionally equivalent to the counterpart FMVSS. One reason for conservatism is that differences from vehicle model to vehicle model and manufacturer to manufacturer in margins of compliance may confound efforts to assess the relative benefits of two standards. Further, there may be circumstantial differences, such as special environmental conditions, driver demographics, driver behavior, occupant behavior (e.g., level of safety belt use), road conditions, size distribution of vehicle fleet (e.g., proportion of big versus small vehicles and disparity between extremes), that could influence real world safety benefits. These differences may result in a particular standard having a safety record in a foreign country that would not necessarily be repeated in the United States.

Best Available Evidence

1. NHTSA will base its comparison of standards on the best available evidence. If available, estimates of real world safety benefits based on fatality and injury data directly drawn from actual crashes are the best evidence. If such data are not available,

then estimates based on other information, such as compliance test data, may be used, although increased caution needs to be exercised in making judgment based on those estimates. If sufficient crash data regarding real world safety benefits are available, and a comparison of those benefits shows that the Country B standard is less beneficial than the counterpart Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS), NHTSA would avoid wasting resources making comparisons on the basis of less probative types of evidence.

2. The types of benefits examined in comparing two standards might differ depending on whether the standards are crash avoidance standards or crashworthiness standards. Translating differences in performance (an input measure) into numbers of crashes or numbers of deaths and injuries (output measures) is more difficult in the case of crash avoidance standards. As a result, while the relative benefits of two crashworthiness standards would typically be assessed in terms of their impacts on deaths and injuries in crashes, the relative merits of two different crash avoidance standards might well be assessed in terms of their impact on vehicle or equipment performance.

Sufficiency of Evidence

1. Many types of data are available for a comparison of two standards. Often there is an abundance of one type of data and little or no data from other sources. If insufficient data are available, and such data either cannot be generated through engineering analysis (e.g., real world safety benefits estimates), or conducting additional research and development is not cost effective, then NHTSA will stop consideration of such data and consider the other available data instead.

2. The essentially horizontal, left-to-right path through the flowchart is intended to illustrate the sources of data that will be considered and provide a rough idea of the priority they will receive. Each step branches independently to the tentative determination of relative benefits and functional equivalency by its “yes” path. This may seem to preclude later steps once any “yes” path is encountered. In practice, however, all data sources will be considered to the extent that they are available before a final determination regarding these matters is made.

Reciprocity

1. NHTSA will take steps to encourage reciprocity by other countries in the making of functional equivalence determinations.

2. When NHTSA’s comparison of standards indicates that one of the FMVSSs has benefits equal to or greater than the counterpart Country B standard, NHTSA may forward the results of that comparison to Country B

and request that consideration be given by Country B to determining that the FMVSS is better than or at least functionally equivalent to the counterpart Country B standard, and to subsequently amending its standard accordingly.

C. AGENCY DECISIONS IN WHICH FLOWCHART IS USED

This flowchart guides agency decisions in connection with a rulemaking proceeding that involves the issue of relative benefits and functional equivalence.

1. *Decision whether to grant a rulemaking petition.* If the agency receives a petition for rulemaking based on a claim that one of Country B's standards is better than or at least functionally equivalent to one of the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSSs), the agency will consider the merits of the petition in accordance with 49 CFR Part 552, Petitions for rulemaking, defect, and noncompliance orders, and with the functional equivalence process set forth in the flowchart. If it appears that there is reason to believe that Country B's standard provides safety benefits are greater than or at least equal to those of the FMVSS, the agency will likely grant the petition and commence a rulemaking proceeding.

The agency emphasizes that its priority with respect to international harmonization is identifying and adopting those foreign safety standards that represent best practices. Accordingly, if resource limitations make it necessary to choose between competing petitions in granting or processing them, the agency would give priority to petitions asking the agency to upgrade one of its standards to the level of a superior foreign standard over petitions simply asking the agency to add a compliance alternative.

2. *Decision whether to issue a notice of proposed rulemaking.* If NHTSA grants the petition, it will proceed, as in any other rulemaking regarding the FMVSSs, to determine whether amending an FMVSS would be appropriate under the applicable statutory criteria in chapter 301 of title 49, U.S.C. Following the process set forth in the flowchart, the agency will use data submitted by the petitioner, supplemented by data from other sources, to compare performance and tentatively determine whether Country B's standard specified in the petition is better than or at least functionally equivalent to the FMVSS specified in the petition.

This comparison could have a variety of possible outcomes:

a. *The comparison may indicate that the foreign standard's safety benefits are less than those of the counterpart FMVSS.* If NHTSA determines that the foreign standard results in fewer safety benefits than the counterpart FMVSS, it will terminate the rulemaking proceeding.

b. *The comparison may indicate that the foreign standard's safety benefits are approximately equal to those of the counterpart FMVSS.* If the agency tentatively determines that the safety benefits of a foreign standard are approximately equal to those of a FMVSS, it will take one of two steps in most instances. One possibility is that it will develop a notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) proposing to amend the FMVSS by adding the foreign standard as an alternative to the existing requirements of the FMVSS. The other possibility is that the agency will develop an NPRM proposing to harmonize the FMVSS with the foreign standard. This second approach would enable NHTSA to maintain a single set of requirements and test procedures in its standard, thereby minimizing any drain on its enforcement resources. An additional possibility that might be considered in some instances would be "qualified functional equivalence." Under this third approach, the agency would regard Country B's standard to be functionally equivalent if it is supplemented by a specified requirement in the counterpart FMVSS.

c. *The comparison may indicate that the foreign standard's safety benefits are greater than those of the counterpart FMVSS.* If NHTSA tentatively determines that the foreign standard results in greater safety benefits than the counterpart FMVSS, and if upgrading is appropriate, based on the incremental benefits and costs and applicable statutory criteria, the agency issues an NPRM proposing to upgrade the FMVSS to the level of Country B's std. If upgrading is not appropriate, NHTSA considers issuing an NPRM proposing to add the requirements of Country B's std to the FMVSS as an alternative compliance option. The proposal to add the compliance option would set forth the basis for the agency's conclusion that upgrading the FMVSS is inappropriate. If NHTSA issues an NPRM, it would request comment on the tentative determination and the proposed amendment.

3. *Decision whether to issue a final rule.* Any final decision to make a determination regarding relative benefits and functional equivalency and to amend the FMVSS will be made in accordance with the process in the flowchart and applicable law and only after careful consideration and analysis of the public comments.

[63 FR 26514, May 13, 1998]

PART 554—STANDARDS ENFORCEMENT AND DEFECTS INVESTIGATION

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- 554.2 Purpose.
- 554.3 Application.