
Technology Improves Driver License Testing

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For More Information Contact: Alabama Department of Public Safety
Public Information/Education Unit, (334) 242-4445

Montgomery - - Taking the knowledge exam for your driver license will be a faster and more user-friendly experience, thanks to the Alabama Department of Public Safety's new computerized test system. Now, instead of paper, pencil and manual scoring, applicants for a driver license will take the test on an ATM-like, touch-screen computer terminal that will automatically record the answers you select and grade your test.



The new system is being purchased with the help of a federal grant from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. Eight Commercial Driver License (CDL) testing locations across the state will be equipped with the high-tech test stations, which will deliver knowledge exams for commercial vehicle drivers in both English and Spanish. The testing sites will be located in Montgomery, Huntsville, Hartselle, Jacksonville, Tuscaloosa, Sumiton, Dothan, and Mobile.

Customers seeking a Commercial Driver License can face answering up to 185 questions on seven different tests. The new computer automated testing system will enable Driver License Examiners to process more customers thereby reducing waiting time. "This system will not only increase efficiency and allow applicants to get in and out faster, it will also greatly improve the security of the testing process," says Major Roscoe Howell, Chief of the Department of Public Safety's Driver License Division. "Computerized testing allows each test to be constructed in a random fashion from a database of over 800 questions. This ensures that no two applicants ever get exactly the same test, and virtually eliminates cheating."

The computerized testing system also will enable testing for the Class D operator license, that most drivers possess, in twelve foreign languages including Spanish, French, German, Korean, Vietnamese, Thai, Arabic, Farsi, Japanese, Greek, Russian or Chinese.

For those customers who are unable to read or find it difficult to take a written test the touch-screen test stations are equipped with a telephone handset. The instructions, questions and possible answers are read to them and they can follow the audio instructions at their own pace and without embarrassment. Using the handset also will prevent the audio from disturbing other applicants in the testing area.

The system also has many features designed to accommodate test-takers, including:

- Test questions are presented on the computer screen with an accompanying color picture, video or 3D animation of road signs and typical driving situations, giving applicants a better understanding of the question.

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- Driver license examiners can use a “quick pass/fail” feature in the software that automatically concludes a test when the applicant has answered enough questions either correctly or incorrectly to pass or fail. This feature helps move applicants through the testing process more quickly.
- At the end of a test, applicants can review the questions answered incorrectly. The computer screen will display the answer they selected and, if allowed by the examiner, they can reference the correct answer to the question or the page in the driver’s manual. This will help applicants who fail a test to be better prepared the next time.
- The system can still produce a printed test for anyone who needs to take a paper and pencil exam, but the test is produced using the same randomization process that ensures a unique test for each applicant.

The system also automatically grades tests and captures results in a database, which will help DPS personnel keep track of testing activity and spot trends or problems. “We believe this system will make our knowledge testing a more pleasant and stress-free experience for all Alabama residents, especially our commercial vehicle operators” says Major Howell. “And, it will greatly enhance the ability of our DPS examiners to handle a rising workload while maintaining efficiency and speed.”

The automated testing system is from Birmingham-based OMG, Inc., a provider of self-service, Web-based solutions for state and local governments. The testing system software is based on the latest Web technologies that will open new options for delivering testing in the future.

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