

CSA DRIVER TOOLKIT

Learn About CSA and How to Keep
Your Carrier's Scores Low



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Introduction

Safety is always the number one focus of a motor carrier and its drivers. Compliance, Safety, Accountability (CSA) is a Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) program designed to improve large truck and bus safety and prevent crashes, injuries and fatalities related to commercial motor vehicles (CMVs) on our nation's roads. CSA assigns scores based on safe and unsafe carrier and driver behaviors.

How does CSA affect you, the driver?

- Unsafe carrier and driver behaviors that lead to crashes are identified and addressed.
- All safety-based roadside inspection violations count toward CSA scores, not just out-of-service (OOS) violations.
- Drivers are more accountable for safe on-road performance, which is good news for drivers with strong safety performance records.

Drive safely and responsibly and you will have nothing to worry about!

CSA—Just the Facts

There is often confusion surrounding the purpose of CSA and what will and won't affect your carrier's scores. Let's set the record straight:

- Carriers and CMV drivers do not need to register for CSA, nor is there any kind of mandatory training requirement. However, it is in your best interest to be informed about CSA and what it will mean for you. CSA is primarily focused on helping the FMCSA improve its enforcement operations.
- CSA has not changed any of the FMCSA regulations.
- Using the new Safety Measurement System (SMS), the FMCSA continues to hold motor carriers responsible for the job performance of those who work for them. Therefore, motor carriers are held accountable for your driving errors, such as speeding. This is a longstanding FMCSA position and is not unique to CSA or the SMS.
- Carriers do not inherit any of your past driving violations. Only those inspections that you receive while driving under a carrier's authority can be applied to that carrier's SMS record.
- All inspections and crashes that you receive while under the authority of a carrier will remain part of the carrier's SMS data for two years unless successfully appealed and overturned through the DataQs system (<https://dataqs.fmcsa.dot.gov>), even if the carrier terminates you.
- Tickets or warnings you receive while operating your personal vehicle do not count in the SMS.
- If a carrier or CMV driver finds any violations in his or her crash or roadside inspection reports that are not listed in the SMS Methodology severity tables, then they do not count towards the carrier's or driver's SMS data.
- The FMCSA regulates all CMVs that weigh over 10,000 lbs. and travel interstate. The FMCSA also regulates CMVs that haul hazardous materials intrastate.
- While research indicates that high body mass index (BMI) is a risk factor for sleep apnea, neither the FMCSA nor the CSA program currently has any rules that restrict who can be a CMV driver based on BMI or weight or neck size. A BMI in the "obese" range (>30) is often cause for health concerns.
- The data kept by a state (e.g., tickets, citations, written warnings, convictions) and the data that is kept in the SMS (violations from roadside inspection and crash reports) are separate. This data must be assessed and, if necessary, corrected under separate processes. All data in the SMS can be verified in the DataQs system.
- CSA does not give the FMCSA the authority to remove drivers from their jobs and cannot be used to rate drivers or to revoke a commercial driver's license (CDL). The FMCSA does not have the authority to take those actions. Only state agencies responsible for issuing licenses have the

authority to suspend them. However, receiving numerous violations can lead to severe penalties from your carrier, up to and including termination.

The BASICS

The SMS uses a motor carrier's data from roadside inspections, including all safety-based violations, state-reported crashes and the federal motor carrier census, to quantify performance in the following Behavior Analysis and Safety Improvement Categories (BASICS):

BASIC Name	Definition	Example Violations
1. Unsafe Driving	Operation of a CMV by drivers in a dangerous or careless manner	Speeding, reckless driving, improper lane change and inattention
2. Hours of Service (HOS) Compliance	Operation of CMVs by drivers who are ill, fatigued or in non-compliance with the HOS and records of duty status (RODS) regulations	HOS and RODS violations and operating a CMV while ill or fatigued
3. Driver Fitness	Operation of CMVs by drivers who are unfit to operate a CMV due to lack of training, experience or medical qualifications	Failure to have a valid and appropriate CDL and being medically unqualified to operate a CMV
4. Controlled Substances/Alcohol	Operation of CMVs by drivers who are impaired due to alcohol, illegal drugs and/or misuse of prescription or over-the-counter medications	Use or possession of controlled substances or alcohol
5. Vehicle Maintenance	Failure to properly maintain a CMV and/or properly prevent shifting loads	Brakes, lights and other mechanical defects, failure to make required repairs and improper load securement
6. Hazardous Materials (HM) Compliance	Unsafe handling of HM on a CMV	Release of HM from package, no shipping papers (carrier) and no placards/markings when required
7. Crash Indicator	Histories or patterns of high crash involvement, including frequency and severity. Based on information from state-reported crashes.	Several accidents in a calendar year would lead to a high score in this BASIC

A carrier's measurement, or score, for each BASIC depends on the following:

- The number of adverse safety events (violations related to that BASIC or crashes)
- The severity of violations or crashes
- When the adverse safety events occurred (more recent events are weighted more heavily)

Keeping Those Scores Low

If you enjoy your job, it is in your best interest to do your part to keep your carrier's BASIC scores low. Its scores are a direct reflection on you as a driver—poor scores may be grounds for termination. Not only do low scores help keep your rig in service and make you as much money as possible, low scores mean fewer accidents and safer roads, as well as lower insurance costs.

All roadside inspection violations that pertain to a BASIC are assigned a severity weight that reflects the violation's association with crash occurrence and crash consequences. The violation severity weights are assigned on a 1 to 10 scale, where 1 represents the lowest crash risk and 10 represents the highest crash risk relative to the other violations in the BASIC. For example, in the Driver Fitness BASIC, operating a CMV without a CDL is assigned a severity weight of 8, and possessing an expired medical examiner's certificate is given a severity weight of 1.

Let's take a look at how you can keep your carrier's scores low in each of the seven BASICS.

1. Unsafe Driving BASIC

- Always buckle up when driving. A recent FMCSA survey indicated that nearly 80 percent of drivers routinely wear their seat belts, and that number continues to grow. Putting on a seat belt only takes a second and can save your life. Don't drive away without putting it on!
- Always follow the speed limit. Speeding tickets are among the most heavily weighted violations in this BASIC, so obeying the speed limit is vital for keeping scores low.
- Pay close attention during driver safety meetings. These meetings are not just a formality—they are designed to help keep you and the other drivers on the road safe, a win-win situation for everyone.
- Daily inspections should be thorough and cover all the truck's safety equipment, including seat belts, turn

Example of Unsafe Driving BASIC Violations and Severity Weight

Violation	Violation Severity Weight
Operating a CMV while texting	10
Failing to properly secure a parked vehicle	1
Failure to obey traffic control device	5
Following too close	5
Speeding 11-14 mph over the limit	7
Speeding 15+ mph over the limit	10
Failure to yield right of way	5
Failure to use seat belt while driving	7
Using or equipping a CMV with a radar detector	5

signals, brake system, brake lights, headlights and taillights.

- If you drive all across the country, be aware of local and state driving regulations, as they may differ from location to location. Ignorance is not an acceptable excuse for not knowing the laws. If you are unsure of a particular location's driving laws, ask your fleet manager.
- Stay alert! Eat healthy while on the road and avoid medications that cause drowsiness. Be aware that smoking, turning up the radio and drinking coffee are not real cures for fatigue.
- Be a defensive driver. This can be easier said than done, especially since the average citizen driver thinks of a CMV as just another vehicle, but driving defensively can help minimize the negative effects a bad driver has on you and the traffic around you. Never let your emotions get the best of you.

2. Hours of Service (HOS) Compliance BASIC

- Fill out your driver log completely and accurately. Since HOS violations are among the most common CSA violations, this is a significant way to lower scores.
- Know the importance of keeping your RODS up to date, accurate and complete. Drivers who understand HOS regulations avoid fines and decrease the chance of fatigue.

Example of HOS BASIC Violations and Severity Weight

Violation	Violation Severity Weight
State/local Hours of Service	7
Operating a CMV while ill/fatigued	10
Fatigue: Operating a passenger-carrying CMV while impaired by fatigue.	10
Fatigue: Operating a property-carrying CMV while impaired by fatigue.	10
Illness: Operating a CMV while impaired by illness or other cause.	10
16-hour rule violation (property)	7
Requiring or permitting a driver to drive more than 11 hours	7

3. Driver Fitness BASIC

- Always keep proper driver documentation in your cab. This includes medical certificates, state driving records, annual reviews of driving records and employment applications.
- Make sure all your documents are still valid. Add expiration dates to a calendar to remind you when your documents expire.
- Exercise when you can. Even walking a few laps around the vehicle while at a rest stop can do wonders for your overall health.
- Aim for eating healthier foods while on the road. Most rest stops now include fresh produce and other nutritious items. Take advantage of them!

4. Controlled Substances/Alcohol BASIC

Violations in this BASIC should be the easiest to avoid compared to other BASICS. Driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol not only increases the likelihood that you will be involved in an accident, it is also against the law! Avoid the temptation and use these tips to keep scores in this BASIC low:

- NEVER drink alcoholic beverages within four hours of being on duty. These beverages can wait until you are off duty.
- Know your employer's drug and alcohol policy. These violations are very

Example of Driver Fitness BASIC Violations and Severity Weight

Violation	Violation Severity Weight
Operating a CMV with more than one driver's license	8
Operating a CMV without a CDL	8
No hazardous materials endorsement on CDL	8
Failing to comply with Imminent Hazard OOS Order	10
Interstate driver under 21 years of age	4
Driver lacking physical qualification(s)	2
Driver not in possession of medical certificate	1

serious—if you violate the policy, you will likely be out of a job.

- Always get permission from your employer to take certain over-the-counter medications. Some may have undesired effects on drivers.
- Attend drug and alcohol training to be aware of their dangers.
- Don't be afraid to talk to your supervisor if the job has stressed you out to the point of considering drugs and alcohol!

5. Vehicle Maintenance BASIC

- Know the nine components that need to be inspected daily in order to drive a CMV:
 1. Service brakes, including trailer brakes
 2. Parking (hand) brake
 3. Steering mechanism
 4. Tires
 5. Lighting devices and reflectors
 6. Horn
 7. Windshield wiper(s)
 8. Rear-vision mirror(s)
 9. Coupling devices

You may not leave without inspecting these parts first!

- Inspect your seat belt, fire extinguisher, mud flaps, tiedowns and fluid levels. Everything counts!
- Immediately report any maintenance

Example of Controlled Substances/Alcohol BASIC Violations and Severity Weight

Violation	Violation Severity Weight
Driver uses or is in possession of drugs	10
Possession/use/under the influence of alcohol—four hours prior to duty	5
Driver in possession of intoxicating beverage while on duty or driving	3
Violating OOS order after a violation in this BASIC	10

problems to dispatch or to the proper supervisor. Never assume a truck will “be just fine” if there is a maintenance issue.

- Pay close attention during maintenance meetings. There are a lot of moving parts on your rig and you should be able to recognize and diagnose many maintenance issues.
- Store extra components in the truck, including bulbs, fuses, reflective tape and wiper blades.
- NEVER operate a CMV that has been placed OOS.

6. Hazardous Materials Compliance BASIC

By their very nature, hazardous materials could do significant damage to you, other drivers and the environment, so it's important to follow the hazardous materials regulations at all times. Here are some tips to keep those scores as low as possible:

- Make sure you have all the proper cargo documentation before hitting the road, including placards and shipping papers. Keep shipping papers within arm's reach at all times.
- Always double-check that your load is secure. Hazardous materials can pose a significant threat if spilled in your vehicle.
- Never smoke around hazardous materials.
- Remember that flatbeds will be monitored more closely by roadside

inspectors. Devote extra attention to securing loads on flatbeds and double-check all tie down straps, chains and other load securement devices before the trip.

7. Crash Indicator BASIC

The major difference between this and the other six BASICs is how it is scored. While the other BASICs are judged and scored based on behaviors discovered during inspections, the Crash Indicator BASIC relies on information from state-reported crashes that meet reportable crash standards from the past three years. If you are involved in a crash, it will show up on the FMCSA's records, whether you were at fault or not. Here are some tips to keep scores low:

- Be a defensive driver. Always anticipate what other drivers around you might do and be prepared to act quickly. Your rig takes a lot longer to stop than a regular passenger car, so give vehicles ahead of you plenty of space.
- Always follow the posted speed limit. Keep an eye out for speed limit changes. Pay special attention to your speed during bad weather.
- Pay close attention during driver safety meetings. These meetings are not just a formality—they are designed to help keep you and the other drivers on the road safe, a win-win situation for everyone.
- Daily inspections should be thorough and cover all the truck's safety equipment, including seat belts, turn

Example of Hazardous Materials (HM) Compliance BASIC Violations and Severity Weight

Violation	Violation Severity Weight
Failure to comply with HM regulations	2
Carrying a package/container for HM not meeting specs	5
Cargo tank does not comply with HM regulations	8
No shipping papers provided	3
Hazardous material not distinguished from non-hazardous material	3
Hazardous materials description not printed legibly in English	3
Additional information not included after hazardous materials basic description	3

signals, brake system, brake lights, headlights and taillights. Minimize the chance for equipment malfunction and you decrease the chance of an accident.

- Stay alert by eating healthy and avoiding medications that cause drowsiness.
- Should you get into an accident, know how to handle the situation. Make sure you have all the required paperwork to make the process go as smoothly as possible.

Crash Indicator BASIC – It Doesn't Matter Who is at Fault

In the Crash Indicator BASIC, crashes are reported to state agencies no matter who is at fault, and all crashes negatively affect your carrier's CSA scores.

The FMCSA has received a lot of criticism for this, as defensive drivers who are involved in a crash when another driver is at fault are penalized for essentially doing nothing wrong.

Your best defense? Be a defensive driver and follow all safety regulations.

General Tips to Lower Scores

The following suggestions apply to most, if not all, of the BASICS:

- Keep lines of communication open. If you have questions about the regulations for a particular area or are feeling fatigued, don't risk a violation—your fleet managers are happy to answer any and all questions and concerns.
- If there is an erroneous violation on your record, talk to your supervisor about appealing it. If you have a good basis for the appeal, there is a good chance it can be expunged from the record. Use the DataQs system for appealing.
- Take driver fatigue training seriously. Driver fatigue is a huge factor in many crashes.
- Strive for clean inspections. Daily inspections are vitally important and should be taken seriously. Spend a few minutes of off-duty time inspecting your rig. Maintenance is also key—a truck out of service doesn't make you or the company any money, and a well-maintained vehicle will do better in roadside inspections.
- Know your carrier's company policies regarding speeding, drug and alcohol use, and more. Ignorance will not be an acceptable reason if you incur a violation.

CSA Red Flag Violations

When investigating a motor carrier, a Safety Investigator (SI) looks at driver history for egregious violations of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSRs).

These violations are sometimes referred to as Red Flag Violations and are always reviewed as part of a carrier investigation.

At present, there are 16 such violations, which are outlined in the accompanying table along with the BASICs to which they correspond.

The 16 Red Flag Violations		
BASIC	FMCSR Part	Violation Description
Driver Fitness*	383.21	Operating a CMV with more than one driver's license
Driver Fitness*	383.23(a)(2)	Operating a CMV without a valid CDL
Driver Fitness*	383.51(a)	Driving a CMV while disqualified
Driver Fitness*	383.51A-SIN	Driving a CMV while CDL is suspended for a safety-related or unknown reason and in the state of driver's license issuance
Driver Fitness*	383.51A-SOUT	Driving a CMV while CDL is suspended for safety-related or unknown reason and outside the state of driver's license issuance.
Driver Fitness*	383.91(a)	Operating a CMV with improper CDL group
Driver Fitness*	391.11	Unqualified driver
Driver Fitness*	391.11(b)(5)	Driver lacking valid license for type of vehicle being operated
Driver Fitness*	391.11(b)(7)	Driver disqualified from operating CMV

Driver Fitness*	391.15(a)	Driving a CMV while disqualified
Driver Fitness*	391.15A-SIN	Driving a CMV while disqualified. Suspended for safety-related or unknown reason and in the state of driver's license issuance.
Driver Fitness*	391.15A-SOUT	Driving a CMV while disqualified. Suspended for a safety-related or unknown reason and outside the driver's license state of issuance.
Controlled Substances/Alcohol	392.4(a)	Driver uses or is in possession of drugs
Controlled Substances/Alcohol	392.5(a)	Possession/use/under influence of alcohol fewer than four hours prior to duty
Fatigued Driving (HOS)	395.13(d)	Driving after being declared OOS
Vehicle Maintenance	396.9(c)(2)	Operating an OOS vehicle

*As you can see, 12 of the 16 Red Flag Violations are in the Driver Fitness BASIC. The FMCSA takes these violations very seriously, and so should you!

The FMCSA keeps a closer eye on drivers who have been cited for these violations and the carriers that hire them. If you are cited for a Red Flag Violation, address it immediately.

Uncorrected driver violations may result in a driver Notice of Violation or Notice of Claim.

CSA FAQs

Q: Why does the FMCSA's CSA program emphasize driver safety enforcement?

A: Studies have shown that unsafe driver behavior, both on the part of CMV drivers and other drivers, is a major contributor to CMV-related crashes. Some studies indicate that a small segment of the CMV driver population is involved in a disproportionately large number of crashes. As a result, during the CSA Operational Model Test, the FMCSA expanded its approach to identifying and addressing unsafe drivers during interventions with motor carriers.

Q: Can you describe the CSA driver safety enforcement process?

A: The driver safety enforcement process provides the FMCSA with the tools to identify CMV drivers with safety performance problems and to verify and address the issues. These tools enable Safety Investigators (SIs) to identify drivers with poor safety histories who work for carriers that have been identified as requiring a CSA investigation. If the investigation results verify the driver violation(s), the FMCSA takes an enforcement action against that driver, such as a Notice of Violation (NOV) or a Notice of Claim (NOC).

Q: What kind of driver safety performance data is CSA looking at?

A: The program focuses on driver enforcement for serious violations, such as the following:

- Driving while disqualified
- Driving without a valid commercial driver's license
- Making a false entry on a medical certificate
- Committing numerous Hours of Service violations

Q: Do tickets or warnings that I receive while operating my personal vehicle impact the SMS?

A: No. Tickets or warnings that drivers receive while operating their personal cars are state citations and do not count in the measurement system. The SMS only uses violations of the FMCSA's regulations, and those regulations only apply to people driving large CMVs. In measuring on-road safety performance, the SMS uses all safety-based violations documented at roadside inspections as well as state-reported crashes.

Q: Does CSA assign safety ratings to individual CMV drivers? I heard that CSA is designed to rate CMV drivers and to put many of them out of work.

A: No. Under CSA, individual CMV drivers are not assigned safety ratings or Safety Fitness Determinations (SFDs). Consistent with the current safety rating regulations (49 CFR part 385), individual drivers who operate independently as a "motor carrier" (i.e., they have their own USDOT number, operating authority and insurance) will continue to be rated as a motor carrier, as they were under the earlier SafeStat model, following an on-site investigation at their place of business. CSA is designed to meet one overriding objective: to increase safety on the nation's roads. Therefore, it is, by design, a

positive program for drivers and carriers with strong safety performance records. CSA sends a strong message that drivers and carriers with poor safety performance histories need to improve.

Q: What is the Pre-Employment Screening Program (PSP) and when does it start?

A: PSP is an FMCSA program mandated by Congress that is designed to assist the motor carrier industry in assessing individual operators' crash and serious safety violation history as a pre-employment condition. The program is voluntary. It is not part of CSA. For more information about PSP, visit the FMCSA's PSP website at www.psp.fmcsa.dot.gov.

Q: What is the detailed process to contest information contained in my FMCSA driver records?

A: Drivers should use the FMCSA's DataQs system to make a Request for Data Review (RDR) in FMCSA databases. To do this, drivers can go to the DataQs registration page at <https://dataqs.fmcsa.dot.gov/login.asp>, select "Register Online" as a general public user, and create a DataQs account profile. Once registered, drivers can request a review of their data by following detailed instructions in the help menu. The agency is in the process of improving the DataQs website to make the process of requesting a data review more apparent to drivers.

Q: How does the SMS handle crashes when drivers are not at fault?

A: The structure of the new SMS is such that the driver's role in the crash (i.e., preventability) is not automatically determined or considered. In fact, recordable crash reports that states submit to the FMCSA do not include the driver's role in the crash. Consequently, motor carriers are identified for possible intervention based on recordable crashes without consideration of the driver's role.

This approach is taken because data analysis has historically shown that drivers who are involved in crashes, regardless of the driver's role, are likely to be involved in more future crashes than drivers who are not. Put simply, past crashes are a good predictor of future crashes.

Q: What is a "clean inspection"?

A: A "clean inspection" is when a relevant roadside inspection did not result in any violations for a particular BASIC. Safety inspections with no violations can improve a carrier's SMS results. For example, when a carrier has no BASIC violations related to the Hours of Service Compliance, Driver Fitness and/or Controlled Substances/Alcohol BASICs from a Driver Inspection (Level I, II, III or VI), this clean inspection will lower the associated BASIC measure. Similarly, when a carrier does not have any BASIC violations related to the Vehicle Maintenance and/or Hazardous Materials Compliance BASICs from a Vehicle Inspection (Level I, II, V or VI), this clean inspection will lower the associated BASIC measure. Roughly one-third of the 3.5 million inspections that are uploaded each year have zero violations.

Source: FMCSA