

# BASICS

## Improving Unsafe Driving and Crash Indicator



You want to continue bypassing weigh stations, saving time and money. But you have Alerts in some BASICS and your ISS (Inspection Selection System) score is too high. It's time to take action.

## WHERE DO YOU START?



As you've seen, the FMCSA has a language of its own, mostly expressed in acronyms. To understand how your company is evaluated by FMCSA, you must first understand its language.

BASICS (Behavior Analysis and Safety Improvement Categories) are areas of a company's safety and regulatory compliance. FMCSA compiles data in seven BASICS and compares the results of similar motor carriers. The result provides an individual motor carrier's overall CSA (Compliance, Safety and Accountability) safety percentile ranking. The seven BASICS are:

- Vehicle Maintenance
- Unsafe Driving
- Hours of Service Compliance
- Driver Fitness
- Controlled Substances & Alcohol
- Hazardous Materials Compliance
- Crash Indicator

Overwhelmingly, the BASICS data results from commercial vehicle enforcement inspections. Data comes from the number of truck inspections and the violations uncovered during those inspections. It also results from citations issued on the road, post-crash analysis and from FMCSA or state investigations of motor carriers. Therefore, good truck inspections are fundamental to good BASICS scores.

Truck inspections commonly occur at weigh stations and roadside inspection sites. But not every truck gets inspected. Why? Two factors: first impressions and ISS.

State enforcement agencies have broad discretion over which trucks to inspect. Often, the officer will make a decision based on their first impression of the truck and the driver.

- Visible mechanical problems will almost always get a truck pulled in for a thorough inspection. A torn mudflap or missing clearance light may not represent an immediate safety issue, but it can cause an inspector to wonder what else may be wrong with the truck.
- Reckless driver behavior is another trigger for immediate enforcement action. But even short of unsafe driving, law enforcement will notice the driver who, when approaching a weigh station or roadside site, appears to be scrambling to get his paperwork in order. You can be sure that truck will be pulled in and the driver's credentials, permits and bills of lading will receive a thorough review.





# WHILE NOT A MANDATE, THE ISS SCORE IS THE SINGLE BEST INDICATOR OF THE LIKELIHOOD THAT A CARRIER MAY RECEIVE AN INSPECTION.

ISS is the Inspection Selection System, the numerical score FMCSA provides to agencies responsible for commercial motor vehicle compliance. Those agencies use ISS scores to determine which motor carriers they should prioritize for weigh station pull-in or roadside inspection. ISS scores range from 0 to 100. The lower the score, the better.

While not a mandate, the ISS score is the single best indicator of the likelihood of receiving an inspection. Not surprisingly, carriers must maintain a good ISS score to qualify for or to continue participating in a weigh station bypass program like PrePass. The good news is that a motor carrier's ISS score is within the carrier's control. It starts with doing well on the seven BASICS.

## QUICK QUIZ

1. What does the "B" in BASICS stand for?
2. Where does FMCSA get most of its safety data?
3. True or False: FMCSA tells states which trucks must be inspected.

### Reduce Inspections

- Clean trucks give a good first impression. Dirty trucks can raise a red flag for inspectors.
- In addition to safety and compliance repairs, pay attention to visible items like peeling decals, which may cause an inspector to conduct further inspection.
- Organize your paperwork and have it easily accessible. If you are disorganized, law enforcement may assume your maintenance is as well.

(Quick Quiz answers: 1) Behavior; 2) truck inspections; 3) False. FMCSA provides the ISS score, but states have broad discretion.)

# How does FMCSA calculate the ISS score? What are Alerts?

The BASICs, CSA and ISS scores are all data-driven. The calculations FMCSA goes through can be complex – but there are four aspects of this process you should understand.

1

When determining a carrier's BASIC percentile, FMCSA applies a mathematical formula to a carrier's violations in the last 24 months. Violations that are more recent have greater impact in the equation, as do violations that are more severe. This is commonly referred to as Time and Severity weighting.

Having recent "clean" inspections will tip the scales in your favor as older inspections, those with violations, age out. Similarly, even minor violations can be an improvement over past problems, particularly those that placed a truck or driver out of service (OOS). Improvement in your scores may require close attention over several months, but you are not stuck in the past.

2

You do need enforcement inspections. Because inspections produce the data FMCSA uses to calculate ISS scores, FMCSA will prioritize for inspection those motor carriers who simply do not yet have enough inspections to generate a safety profile.

This is another opportunity to improve your scores. Reach out to your local state commercial vehicle enforcement agency and see whether they will conduct voluntary truck inspections. If not – they may be short on manpower – perhaps they do give demonstrations to motor carrier groups. You can learn directly from the inspectors themselves.

3

FMCSA applies an Alert symbol to a carrier's BASIC when the carrier's percentile is at or above the "Intervention Threshold" established for that category. It can also apply when the carrier has Acute and/or Critical Violations. These are one-time occurrences discovered during an investigation of noncompliance so severe that immediate corrective action is required. The Alert triggers direct contact by federal or state officials with the motor carrier.

The FMCSA "intervention" contact may simply be a warning letter that the carrier needs to pay closer attention to one area of safety compliance or it may entail a targeted or full compliance review. Interventions can result in fines, penalties and, in severe cases, disqualification as a motor carrier. Alerts are not just an opportunity to improve your scores, they are an alarm bell that improvement must occur. Heed that alarm by looking closely at the sections below for any BASIC where you have an Alert.

## 4

Finally, in the calculation of ISS scores, FMCSA gives greater mathematical weight to three of the BASICS: “Unsafe Driving,” “Hours of Service Compliance,” and “Crash Indicator.” “Unsafe Driving” covers speeding, reckless driving, improper lane change, inattention and not wearing seat belts. “Hours of Service Compliance” means noncompliance with hours-of-service regulations and improper time and duty records. The “Crash Indicator” considers a carrier’s history of crash involvement.

To improve your ISS score, look first to any BASIC where you may be in Alert status. Then see where you stand in these three priority BASICS: “Unsafe Driving,” “Hours of Service Compliance,” and “Crash Indicator,” paying particular attention to “Hours of Service Compliance.” Review the sections for each BASIC, below.

In the end, once FMCSA applies its mathematical formula, the result for that carrier is compared to similar carriers and a percentile ranking is set for that carrier. The percentile ranking says that the carrier’s safety compliance in that BASIC is worse than that percent of similar carriers. So, a high percentile ranking in any BASIC, in the carrier’s CSA score or its ISS ranking is not desirable. And again, a percentile ranking at or above the Intervention Threshold for that BASIC prioritizes that carrier for federal and state interventions.

# QUICK QUIZ

1. How long do past inspections affect your ISS score?
2. What is an “Intervention Threshold”?
3. True or False: All BASICS are created equal.

## Improving BASICS

- Stay on top of your BASICS scores. If you see an Alert, immediately focus your attention on improvement in that BASIC.
- Use the 24-month data cycle as the basis for your BASICS improvement plan, charting steps you will take each month to improve your scores.
- Review every violation, citation and audit/investigation finding. Challenge mistakes or inaccuracies through the FMCSA DataQs process.
- Use the FMCSA Crash Preventability Determination Program to remove non-preventable crashes from consideration in the “Crash Indicator” BASIC.

(Quick Quiz answers: 1) 24 months; 2) the percentile for any BASIC that will trigger direct FMCSA or state contact with a carrier; 3) False. FMCSA gives greater priority to three of the seven BASICS, with “Hours of Service Compliance” being #1.)

# The Unsafe Driving and Crash Indicator BASICs

## How does a motor carrier improve its Unsafe Driving and Crash Indicator BASICs?

Of the seven BASICs, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) places emphasis on three: the Hours of Service Compliance BASIC, the Unsafe Driving BASIC, and the Crash Indicator BASIC. These three BASICs hold the greatest mathematical weight in FMCSA calculations of Inspection Selection System (ISS) scores. This paper will consider two of them; the Unsafe Driving BASIC and the Crash Indicator BASIC.

The Unsafe Driving BASIC covers speeding, reckless driving, improper lane change, inattention and failure to wear seatbelts. The Crash Indicator BASIC considers a carrier's history of crash involvement.

Improvement in these two BASICs may seem as simple as drivers not speeding or operating recklessly. But unsafe driving does not account for all crashes. For example, poor vehicle maintenance, drug and alcohol use, and incomplete training can lead to crashes – or some crashes may be completely non-preventable. To improve a motor carrier's Unsafe Driving and Crash Indicator BASICs requires a whole team effort, founded on the safety culture set by management.



# Management Responsibility

Whether in Unsafe Driving, Crash Indicator or any other BASIC, only management can give the direction, authority, tools and oversight necessary to improve a motor carrier's safety performance and make safety central to the company's culture. Consistency of results is the goal, and consistency is achieved when employees carry out their directions each and every time.



## 1

### Provide Direction

For safe driving and crash avoidance, the following directions, when carried out consistently, will assure that the motor carrier, its drivers and all employees place safety first in their decisions and actions:

- Make sure all commitments made to customers are legally achievable, both as to hours of service (HOS) and vehicle speed, while protecting the safety of carrier employees.
- Address any possible delay in service to customers by contacting the customer and not by speeding or reckless vehicle operation.
- When planning routes, keep speed limits and variables that affect performance, including loading, unloading, fueling, driver rest breaks and normal traffic, in mind. Account for the fleet's governed speed in route planning, when lower than posted speed limits. Pay attention to routes which prohibit commercial motor vehicle operation or hazardous materials transportation.
- All drivers operate at speeds appropriate for conditions, including traffic, roads and weather, even if lower than the fleet's governed speed or the posted limit.
- No radar detectors are allowed in company trucks. Federal law prohibits motor carriers from requiring or even allowing radar detectors in CMVs. If discovered in a truck cab, an Unsafe Driving violation would be issued.
- All drivers follow federal, state and local driving laws, including wearing seat belts.
- All drivers immediately report unexpected circumstances in transit and follow carrier directions.
- Immediately report all citations or warnings issued to drivers for any type of violation.
- All drivers immediately report crashes and follow carrier directions.
- All drivers immediately report vehicle defects affecting safety or compliance discovered on the road.
- Only hire safe, qualified drivers.



## 2

## Give Authority

To support employees throughout the organization in carrying out these directions, management must give appropriate authority:

- To carrier sales personnel to reject customer demands that clearly cannot be achieved within legal speeds and on appropriate routes.
- To drivers to discontinue operations when unsafe, impractical or whenever the driver is ill or fatigued.
- To drivers to return vehicles for service before operation if they discover safety- and compliance-related defects or when reported defects have not been repaired.
- To dispatchers to withhold equipment from operation until technicians complete required maintenance.
- To dispatchers to withhold driver assignments for loads which cannot be completed without speeding or other violations of law, such as operation on prohibited routes.
- To carrier sales personnel to contact customers and make adjustments for loads that are delayed or cannot be completed within legal speeds and on appropriate routes.
- To carrier hiring staff to hire only drivers who have a clean safety record and a willingness to adhere to federal and state laws and regulations and company policies.

## 3

## Provide Tools

To complete their tasks successfully and efficiently, management must provide employees with the proper tools, both physical and financial. For safe driving and crash avoidance, those tools include:

- Speed governors for fleet vehicles, when appropriate to carrier operations.
- Routing software to facilitate safe and efficient route planning. Ideally, the software chosen will allow carrier input, such as designated parking and rest areas, and will clearly display which roads do not allow operations by commercial motor vehicles or the transportation of hazardous materials.
- Refresher training for drivers of vehicles with special handling characteristics, particularly vehicles with high centers of gravity or carrying fluid loads.
- Secure, mobile communications allowing direct coordination between all team members.

## 4

## Conduct Oversight

Management is responsible for oversight. To assure consistency of results in safe driving and crash avoidance, management must:

- Provide up-to-date mileage figures and any major changes in type of operation on the carrier's MCS-150 form at FMCSA to make sure the carrier's safety record is being compared to similar motor carriers. The FMCSA relies on accurate mileage to calculate a carrier's Crash Indicator BASIC.
- Review the thoroughness of all route planning to ensure drivers can be legally complete trips without speeding or reckless operation.
- Coordinate non-standard pickup, delivery or transit time requests with carrier sales personnel and customers.
- Provide carrier hiring staff with guidance on how to attract, screen and qualify prospective drivers who are most likely to drive safely and within company policies, and how to identify potential high-risk drivers.
- When hiring, obtain motor vehicle records (MVRs) from the state of commercial driver's license issuance for all prospective drivers and review them for unsafe driving violations and crashes over the past three years. Keep a current MVR in each driver qualification file.
- Request all prospective drivers to supply their Pre-Employment Screening Program (PSP) file and review it for unsafe driving violations and crashes. Keep a copy in the driver qualification file, if hired.
- Review the employment records of all prospective drivers for the past three years and contact prior carriers for instances of unsafe driving and crashes.
- Review all current driver violations, of any type, and challenge discrepancies through the FMCSA DataQs process as needed.
- Review all crashes and assess whether carrier practices, such as vehicle maintenance, hours of service compliance, hazardous materials compliance, hiring, or dispatch, contributed to the event. Review the relevant BASICs paper for any carrier practice that potentially contributed to a crash.
- Submit eligible non-preventable crashes to the FMCSA Crash Preventability Demonstration Program through DataQs. Along with thorough documentation, specifically include the police accident report for the crash to have it removed from FMCSA Safety Measurement System (SMS) and Crash Indicator BASIC calculations.
- Ask whether driver violations and crashes are specific to a person, route, customer, equipment issue or potentially system-wide.
- Take action appropriate to findings, whether as reminders, enhanced training, customer contact, improved equipment or discipline.
- Adopt a progressive disciplinary policy dependent on the severity of driver violations, including warnings and suspensions leading up to termination for cause.
- Document all employee training, all hiring queries, and all corrective actions taken, whether in regard to personnel, routes, customers, carrier practices, or in response to driver violations and crashes.

Be assured, FMCSA or state investigators will look for policies and procedures to support these management steps – direction, authority, tools and oversight -- when investigating unsafe driving and crash issues at a motor carrier.

**When Carriers create a strong safety culture among all team members they take the single most important management step related to safe driving and crash avoidance.**

Moving to a safety culture starts with company leadership. Employees notice whether management truly places a premium on safety:

<b>1</b>	Does company leadership get out of the office and visit the shop floor, the loading dock, the drivers' lounge and see what they are asking of employees?
<b>2</b>	Is safety the top item on every meeting agenda?
<b>3</b>	Do employees feel comfortable raising safety issues with their managers?
<b>4</b>	Do line managers and supervisors preach safety before looking at production numbers?
<b>5</b>	When making tough business decisions, including whether to meet a particular customer's demands, is the first question, "Can we do so safely?"

When management delivers a consistent safety message, drivers and all other employees will know that strict adherence to laws, regulations and company policies is just the *first* step toward safe driving and crash avoidance. The *ultimate* goal is protecting each other, the company, its customers, and everyone on the road. Achieving that goal requires open communication, mutual support and the willingness to take steps toward safety that go beyond mere compliance. These safety values start at the top.

A strong safety culture relies on values and intangibles and will produce the measurable results needed to improve a motor carrier's Unsafe Driving and Crash Indicator BASICs.

*One more management responsibility: celebrate.* A fleet's safety culture does not end with adherence to rules or identifying and correcting problems. Communication and celebration of success are important components. Incentives, recognition and bonuses for clean inspections, safe driving milestones, and improvements in the company's BASICs scores build trust and unity and result in further improvement.

**SAFETY  
CULTURE  
DEPENDS ON  
CONSISTENCY  
OF MESSAGE  
AND VALUES  
FROM THE  
TOP DOWN.**

# Team Responsibility

A motor carrier gets paid to deliver safely and on time. Extra time needed for vehicle maintenance, changes at customer facilities, heavy traffic along a carrier route – all the challenges and adjustments that a workday brings -- affect carrier performance and ultimately everyone who works there. They can also create a negative incentive to take safety shortcuts, such as speeding, reckless driving or deferred vehicle maintenance. Safety shortcuts increase the potential for crashes.

The only way to meet challenges with an eye toward safety is open, transparent communication throughout the organization. Team members, including drivers, can make appropriate decisions when they share the same set of facts and the same commitment to protecting each other, the company, its customers, and fellow motorists on the highway.

Here are specific team member responsibilities by job function:



## Drivers

Driver responsibility begins with communication to management and team members:

- Report any vehicle problems and defects from the road so carrier maintenance can plan repairs, dispatch can make adjustments, and other drivers can take rest breaks. Sharing information allows the team to make adjustments in the interest of safety.
- Report any violations or warnings immediately. Management can then intervene as needed, determine the next safe course of action, and drivers, vehicles and loads are not unnecessarily delayed or stranded.
- Report difficulties with routes, parking or rest areas and any newfound parking or rest areas so management can make adjustments and pass them on to other drivers. Safe and legal truck parking means rested drivers and improved safety.
- Report unusual operational circumstances so dispatch can chart a legal and safe course of action.
- If involved in a crash, report immediately and follow management directions.
- Report problems at customer facilities so management can intervene.
- If sick or fatigued, stop driving at a safe location and call in.





Driver responsibility obviously includes safe vehicle operation:

- Before even starting the engine:
  - » Conduct a pre-trip vehicle inspection and report any maintenance issues.
  - » Adjust seat and mirrors.
  - » Review route.
  - » Stow unneeded mobile devices.
  - » Place bills of lading, permits and other official documents where they can be readily accessed for safety officials.
  - » Buckle seatbelt.
  - » Look around vehicle for obstacles, pedestrians, traffic before starting to drive.

These simple pre-trip steps help avoid several Unsafe Driving errors, including not wearing a seatbelt, inattention and distraction on the road.

- On the road, follow all federal, state and local laws and ordinances. Stay alert for signs indicating roads closed to commercial motor vehicles or to hazardous materials transportation.
- Watch for road construction in summer, snow plows and road closures in winter.
- Follow the directions of enforcement officers and emergency officials. Their goal is safety, too.
- Drive at an appropriate speed, considering road conditions, weather and traffic, even if that speed is lower than posted or below the company's governed speed limit.
- Do not use, or even keep in the cab, a radar detector. Even the presence of one in a CMV is illegal under federal law and will result in an Unsafe Driving violation when discovered.
- Keep a cushion between vehicles. Anticipate inattentive drivers. Take cues from surroundings that suggest heavier traffic, merging vehicles or pedestrians may be ahead. Use turn signals and blinkers to alert other drivers to your intentions or to conditions ahead.
- Remember to conduct the required en route vehicle inspection (after three hours or 150 miles). Especially check cargo security and load shifting. These issues can lead to difficulties in vehicle handling and potentially a crash and enforcement officers will cite them as Unsafe Driving upon review.
- If you suspect a driver to be under the influence, sick or otherwise incapacitated, pull safely off the road and contact the highway patrol for intervention.
- Conduct post-trip vehicle inspection and report any maintenance problems on a DVIR (Driver Vehicle Inspection Report) so the next driver can have a safe, repaired vehicle to operate.

## Dispatch

- Withhold equipment from operation until technicians complete required maintenance.
- Withhold driver assignments for loads that would require speeding or other violations of law, such as operation on prohibited hazardous materials routes.
- Coordinate with management and carrier sales personnel on delayed loads or those that cannot be completed within customer expectations so that a safe course of action can be chosen.
- Openly share changes in dispatch with team members, especially with affected drivers.

## Maintenance

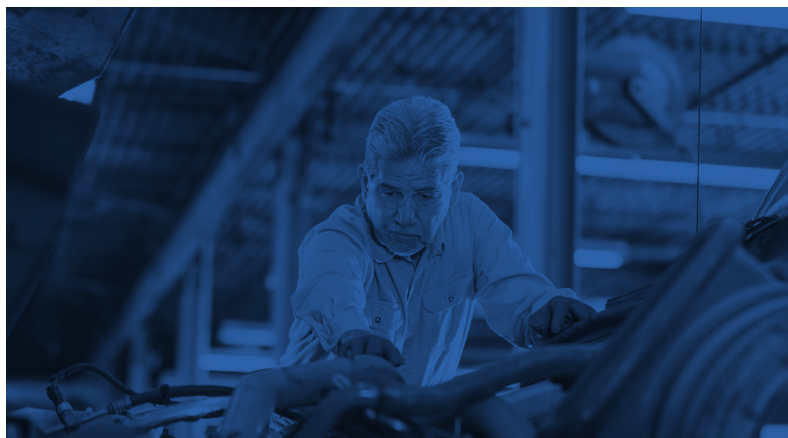
- Prioritize repairs related to safety and compliance.
- Address visual defects, such as peeling decals, which may trigger a roadside inspection, and put the driver behind schedule.
- Openly share the time required for repairs with team members, especially with dispatch and affected drivers, so drivers can take rest breaks and adjust their schedules.

## Sales

- Refuse customer demands that clearly cannot be achieved within legal speeds and on appropriate routes.
- Contact customers and make adjustments for delayed loads or those that cannot be completed within legal speeds and on appropriate routes. Coordinate responses with management and dispatch.
- Openly share changes at customer facilities, changes in the description, packaging or handling of customer freight, or changes to other customer expectations. Those changes can affect carrier operations, driver time and availability, and the safety of fellow employees.

Carriers will always face challenges to performance. Open, transparent communication among all team members allows appropriate decisions to be made to meet those challenges in ways that do not jeopardize safety or induce unsafe driving. Improvement in a motor carrier's Unsafe Driving and Crash Indicator BASICS requires a whole team effort, founded on the safety culture set by management. That can lead to qualifying for and continuing in a weigh station bypass program like PrePass.

*A final reminder:* crashes, and the motor carrier's overall ISS score, are not always about unsafe driving, so be sure to review the roles team members play in each of the seven BASICS.





# QUICK QUIZ

1. What creates a strong safety culture?
2. How are good decisions made about safety?
3. True or False: Crashes are always caused by unsafe driving.

## Helpful Hints

- Team attitude makes a difference in safe driving. One carrier reported improvement in driver performance after dispatch began wishing drivers a safe trip. Another saw better results when maintenance sincerely thanked drivers for pointing out needed repairs.
- Speeding is not always about hours of service pressures or over-the-road operations. Sometimes drivers, perhaps at the urging of carrier sales, may try to squeeze one more local trip into a workday. Management should emphasize that all operations, of whatever length on whatever road, should never require drivers to exceed legal speed limits.
- No one expects to crash. Drivers must anticipate the unexpected. How? By driving for the non-professionals on the road, who may make unexpected and dangerous decisions.

(Quick Quiz answers: 1) Safety culture depends on consistency of message and values, from the top down; 2) Good safety decisions begin with open communication among team members; 3) False. Crashes can be caused by many factors, including weaknesses in other carrier practices, or be completely non-preventable.)





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