



## THE CSA IS HERE TO STAY

In 2010, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) implemented the Compliance, Safety, and Accountability Program (CSA). The purpose of the CSA is to “prevent commercial motor vehicle-related fatalities and injuries.” It does this by scoring carriers in a series of categories that are based on safety performance data.

The main driving factor behind the new program is that it allows the FMCSA to identify carriers that may require safety intervention and monitoring. It also hopes to increase public awareness by creating a safety database, which the public and interested parties, such as shippers and insurers, can utilize when making business decisions on whether or not to hire a carrier.

The CSA is here to stay and companies need to know how to manage their scores.

### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE CSA- SCORING METHOD

The FMCSA collects and analyzes carrier and driver safety data for six areas called Behavior Analysis and Safety Improvement Categories (BASICS), as well as provides carriers with a “Crash Indicator” that is based on the carrier’s crash history. The BASICS are:

- Unsafe Driving;
- Fatigued Driving (Hours-of-Service records);
- Driver Fitness;
- Controlled Substances/Alcohol;
- Vehicle Maintenance; and
- Cargo-Related.

Once the safety data of each carrier is collected, weighted, and adjusted, the carrier is assigned a score for each BASIC and Crash Indicator. Scores range from 0 to 100 percent and the lower the score, the better. Then the carrier is assigned to a “Safety Event Group” that contains peers that have similar safety risks. Lastly, the carrier’s scores are compared to peers in the Safety Event Group.

### RESEARCH FINDINGS: WHO IS LEADING THEM WAY?

The Texas Trucking Alliance’s (TTA) 2011 Texas Trucking Industry Study determined that four main strategies were used by carriers to improve safety metrics: additional driver training; hiring outside safety experts; hiring additional safety personnel; and installing monitoring devices on vehicles. Safety strategies differed among companies as seen below.

Safety Strategy	Small Carriers (1-10 drivers)	Large Carriers (11+ drivers)	Leading Sector
Additional Driver Training	23%	72%	Specialty Haulers 69% Hazardous Material Carriers 56%

Outside Safety Experts	39%	36%	Intrastate Carriers 63% Interstate Carriers 17% Refrigerated Transportation Carriers 75%
Additional Safety Personnel	34%	41%	Interstate Carriers 59% Intrastate Carriers 5% Movers 71%
Monitoring Devices	4%	14%	Hazardous Material Carriers 24%

### HOW TO KEEP FROM GETTING FLAGGED IN EACH BASIC

CSA scoring relies on safety violations and reports of behaviors that have been linked to unsafe driving practices. By taking to following key steps, carriers can boost their chances of having low scores in each BASIC:

**Educate:** In each of the BASIC categories, a carrier can reduce their chances of getting flagged for a violation by simply being educated on what BASIC scores measure. A recent study conducted by the American Transportation Research Institute found that drivers were poorly informed on key parts of the CSA. An increased understanding can help companies and drivers avoid practices that lead to higher scores.

**Monitor:** It is necessary for carriers to utilize the FMCSA’s website to track their BASIC scores and identify any negative trends. By identifying problem areas early on, companies can easily deal with issues before they become out of control.

**Log Hours:** Fatigued driving and hours-of-service violations can best be controlled by being aware of the number of hours a driver is on the road. That’s accomplished by making sure drivers properly log their hours. It is vital that this behavior be closely monitored, because fatigued driving has been linked to other violations, such as substance abuse and unsafe driving.

**Obey the Law:** Drivers can dramatically reduce their carrier’s Unsafe Driving score by simply following the speed limit and properly changing lanes.

**Have “Fit” Drivers:** Driver Fitness is determined by driver health and proper licenses. It is necessary to ensure all drivers have a valid and appropriate CDL. Medical fitness is more difficult to control, but encouraging drivers to get daily exercise can dramatically improve this area.

**Address Substance Abuse:** Controlled substances are adverse to drivers’ health and violations stay on a carrier’s record for 24 months. The best way to handle this difficult subject is to make sure drivers are aware of the carrier’s policy on substance abuse and the resources that it has available for them.

**Use Vehicle Maintenance and Cargo Programs:** Maintaining the vehicle is another behavior that is tracked by the CSA. To avoid cargo-related violations, drivers should check their logbook each time a truck is loaded or unloaded and verify the paperwork and the cargo. According to Chad Hall, FFE Transportation Service Compliance and Security Director, “An excellent vehicle maintenance program must be in place. Routine inspections can lead to a decrease in equipment violations. Drivers must complete a thorough and detailed pre-trip inspection. And defects should be addressed immediately and before the vehicle is placed on the roadway.”

**Use Technology:** New safety technology is available to companies that can afford it. According to Chad Hall, “Lane Departure Warning Systems on trucks can assist in lane change

violations as well as decreased crashes”. He also noted that his company “recently completed the installation of electronic on-board recorders in their entire fleet and have seen significant decreases in hours-of-service violations.”

**Know What You Can Control:** According to David Saunders, CEO of Compliance Safety Systems, “Your company cannot control or be responsible for the ‘other carriers’ in your peer group,” but nevertheless, a carrier “MUST have a due diligence program that is able to be viewed by your customers and FMCSA that shows action taken to manage your company and drivers.” Even though the CSA’s use of peer groups could lead to bizarre results where top performers—or bottom for that matter—could have completely different BASIC scores depending on which Safety Event Group they are placed, companies need to make a good faith effort to implement a quality safety program.

### **WHY DOES IT MATTER?**

Maintaining a good BASIC score is important to avoid an intervention from FMCSA and to minimize business costs. If a carrier’s score is above a certain percentile it will be targeted for an intervention. “The bigger picture is what impact your scores will have regarding driver retention, negative brand recognition and how you conduct business, and of course ‘vicarious liability’ factors,” added David Saunders. The BASIC score is public information and can be viewed by customers, insurers, and parties involved in lawsuits.

### **WHAT SAFETY AREAS MAY SEE MORE RESEARCH BY THE ALLIANCE?**

In March, The Texas Trucking Alliance began preparing to update the annual Texas Trucking Industry Study. The research will re-assess the impact that safety regulations have had on the industry, what carriers and drivers are doing to adapt to the changing regulatory framework, and how they are improving safety practices.

Like most regulations, the CSA can seem daunting and cause anxiety for business owners. But it is here to stay, and if carriers want to succeed in the Texas transportation industry, they need to learn how this law affects them and what other carriers are doing to comply with the law—and more importantly, what they are doing to improve road safety.