

Carrier Safety Ratings and How They Become Evidence in Georgia Truck Accident Cases

The Government Has Been Keeping Score on Trucking Companies. So Should You.

Every commercial trucking carrier operating on Georgia's highways has a federal safety record. It's public, it's detailed, and it tells a story about how that carrier manages — or mismanages — the safety of its drivers, its vehicles, and the people who share the road with them. Most Georgia drivers have never heard of the [Compliance, Safety, Accountability program](#) or the carrier safety scores it produces. The trucking companies that earn bad ones are counting on that.

When a serious [truck accident](#) happens, a carrier's safety record isn't just background information. In the right hands, it becomes some of the most powerful evidence available for establishing that the company knew its operations were dangerous and kept putting unsafe drivers and poorly maintained trucks on Georgia's roads anyway. That's the difference between a claim against a driver and a claim against a carrier whose negligence was systemic, documented, and ignored.

At the [Law Offices of Gary Martin Hays & Associates, P.C.](#), we know how to find that record, read it, and use it. Georgia truck accident victims deserve to understand how carrier safety ratings work and why they matter to the value and strength of their claims.

What the FMCSA's Safety Measurement System Actually Tracks

The [Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration \(FMCSA\)](#) operates a data-driven safety monitoring program called the Compliance, Safety, Accountability system, or CSA. Introduced in 2010, it replaced the agency's earlier safety monitoring framework with a more continuous, granular approach to identifying carriers whose operations pose elevated risks on public roads.

The CSA system works by collecting data from roadside inspections, crash reports, and compliance investigations and feeding it into the Safety Measurement System, or SMS. That system scores every registered carrier across seven [Behavior Analysis and Safety Improvement Categories](#), known as BASICs. Each category tracks a specific dimension of carrier safety performance.

The seven BASIC categories are:

- **Unsafe Driving:** [Speeding](#), reckless driving, [improper lane changes](#), and other dangerous driving behaviors observed during roadside inspections or reported in crash data.
- **Hours Of Service Compliance:** Violations of federal rules governing how long drivers can operate without mandatory rest periods, including [false or falsified logs](#).

- **Driver Fitness:** Issues with driver qualifications, licensing, medical certifications, and whether drivers met the legal requirements to operate a commercial vehicle.
- **Controlled Substances And Alcohol:** [Drug and alcohol violations by drivers](#), including positive test results and refusals to test.
- **Vehicle Maintenance:** Brake failures, [tire defects](#), lighting violations, and other equipment problems identified during inspections that signal a carrier's failure to maintain its fleet.
- **Hazardous Materials Compliance:** Violations related to the handling, labeling, and transportation of [hazardous materials](#).
- **Crash Indicator:** A carrier's history of crash involvement relative to its peers, weighted by severity and recency.

Scores range from 0 to 100 within each category, and higher is worse. A carrier scoring above the intervention threshold in any category — 65 or above in Unsafe Driving, Crash Indicator, and Hours of Service Compliance, for example — triggers FMCSA scrutiny that can escalate from warning letters to full compliance audits to operational restrictions.

Why a Carrier's CSA Score Matters in a Georgia Injury Case

A carrier's CSA score is not itself admissible as evidence in Georgia civil litigation in the same way a medical record or crash report would be. But it functions as a roadmap. Think of it less like a report card and more like a trail of breadcrumbs that leads a skilled attorney directly to the specific violations, inspection records, and documented failures that do become admissible evidence when built into a negligence claim.

When a carrier has elevated scores in Vehicle Maintenance, that score points toward a pattern of [deferred maintenance](#) that the company knew about. When Unsafe Driving scores are elevated, those numbers reflect documented observations of dangerous driver behavior across the fleet. When the Hours of Service category is above threshold, it signals a systemic tolerance for [fatigued driving](#) that the carrier chose not to correct.

Each of those elevated scores is a pointer toward specific inspection reports, violation records, and enforcement actions that paint a picture of what the carrier knew, when they knew it, and what they chose to do about it. In a Georgia truck accident case, that picture is the foundation of a claim for punitive damages; the kind of damages that go beyond compensating the victim and hold a company accountable for conduct that was not just negligent but reckless.

What the Underlying Violation Data Reveals

The real evidentiary value in the CSA system isn't the aggregate scores. It's the underlying violation data those scores are built from. Every roadside inspection that produced a violation is documented in the SMS with the date, location, nature of the violation, and severity weight assigned to it. That granular record gives an attorney a detailed history of exactly what inspectors found wrong with a carrier's trucks and drivers over time.

For example, consider a Georgia family whose car was struck by a tractor-trailer with [brake failure](#). A search of the carrier's SMS data reveals that the same carrier had been cited for brake violations in seven roadside inspections over the preceding 18 months. The carrier received a warning letter from the FMCSA six months before the crash. Maintenance records show the violations were noted but repairs were deferred to save money.

That sequence — documented violation, official warning, deliberate inaction, catastrophic crash — isn't just evidence of negligence. It's evidence of the kind of conscious disregard for safety that supports a punitive damages claim under Georgia law. The CSA data didn't cause the crash, but it illuminated the path that led to it.

How Carrier Safety Ratings Interact With Georgia's SB 68 Tort Reform

Georgia's [Senate Bill 68](#) introduced important changes to how evidence is presented and argued in personal injury trials, and those changes make the carrier safety record more strategically important than it was before. The new rules around bifurcated trials mean that liability is decided in phase one before a jury ever hears about the victim's injuries or damages.

In that phase one environment, the carrier's documented safety history is among the most compelling evidence available. A jury deciding whether the carrier was negligent, without yet knowing the full human cost of what happened, responds to a pattern of documented violations in a way that raw testimony about the crash alone cannot replicate.

A carrier that earned warning letters from the FMCSA, had trucks placed out of service during inspections, and allowed hours-of-service violations to go uncorrected across its fleet is a carrier whose negligence is written in the government's own records.

That's precisely the kind of evidence that wins phase one, and winning phase one is what opens the door to full accountability in phase two.

How to Access a Carrier's Safety Record

Georgia injury victims and their attorneys can access a carrier's safety record through several publicly available federal tools. The FMCSA's [Safety Measurement System](#) provides carrier-level CSA data including BASIC scores, inspection history, and violation records.

The most useful data for litigation purposes includes:

- **Roadside Inspection Reports:** Every inspection that produced a violation is documented with the specific defect or behavior observed, giving attorneys a concrete factual basis for negligence claims tied to specific equipment or driver failures.
- **Out-Of-Service Orders:** When a vehicle or driver was placed out of service during an inspection, that record establishes that the carrier's equipment or personnel were found to be unsafe by federal or state enforcement officers.

- **Crash History:** The carrier's crash record over the preceding two years, including the nature of each crash and whether it resulted in injuries or fatalities, establishes a pattern of dangerous operations that goes beyond the single incident at issue.
- **FMCSA Warning Letters And Investigation Results:** Formal communications from the FMCSA to the carrier identifying safety deficiencies and directing corrective action create a documented record of what the company knew and when they knew it.
- **Driver Qualification Files:** Individual driver records including license status, medical certifications, training history, and prior violations are obtainable through litigation discovery and can reveal whether the driver involved in the crash should ever have been behind the wheel.

Georgia's Billion Dollar Truck Wreck Lawyer Knows Where to Look

A carrier's safety record doesn't disappear after a crash. But accessing it, understanding it, and connecting it to the specific facts of a case requires legal experience and a systematic approach to investigation.

The [Law Offices of Gary Martin Hays & Associates, P.C.](#) has been building Georgia truck accident cases from the ground up for more than 30 years, and we know how to turn a carrier's own federal safety record into the evidence that holds them accountable.

If you were injured in a Georgia truck accident, [contact us](#) today for a free consultation. We represent injury victims on a contingency basis, meaning no upfront costs and no legal fees unless we recover compensation for you.