

What Happens When an Overheight Truck Strikes a Bridge in Georgia?

Georgia Law Sets a Hard Ceiling on How Tall Commercial Trucks Can Be

A [tractor-trailer](#) carrying a load stacked six inches too high approaches an I-285 overpass at highway speed. The driver was dispatched with routing directions that never accounted for the bridge clearance. A warning sign flashes past the cab in the last quarter-mile. There's no shoulder wide enough to stop and no exit close enough to save the situation.

The trailer strikes the underside of the overpass. Steel folds, debris rains down onto the vehicles beneath, and a chain-reaction pileup starts that will take the rest of the day to sort out.

Bridge strikes in Georgia don't happen without warning. They happen because a chain of decisions well before the trailer ever left the yard, from cargo loading to route selection to dispatch pressure to GPS choices, created a truck that was never safe on the road the carrier put it on. Under [O.C.G.A. § 32-6-22](#), no vehicle may exceed 13 feet, 6 inches in height on Georgia public roads. The moment a rig rolls past a posted clearance sign it can't clear, a legal violation is already in motion.

The [Law Offices of Gary Martin Hays & Associates, P.C.](#) has represented injured Georgians since 1993, and bridge-strike cases sit at the intersection of federal trucking regulation, cargo-loading responsibility, and routing decisions that carriers make hours or days before a driver ever gets behind the wheel. That's where the strongest cases are built.

What Makes a Truck Overheight in the First Place?

Height violations don't always come from a driver simply guessing wrong. The causes are often systemic, tied to decisions made well before the vehicle left the terminal. The most common reasons a commercial truck exceeds the 13.5-foot Georgia limit are:

- **An Improperly Secured Or Overstacked Load:** Freight stacked higher than the trailer's approved specifications or secured in a way that raises the center of mass can push a rig past the legal height without triggering an alert. This failure often traces back to the shipper or freight loader, not just the driver.
- **Non-Standard Or Modified Equipment:** After-market lift systems, refrigeration units mounted on the roof of a trailer, or equipment that wasn't present when the vehicle was originally certified can add unexpected height. Carriers that fail to maintain accurate vehicle specifications own that risk.
- **Oversized Load Permit Violations:** Georgia allows vehicles above the standard height limit to travel on designated routes with a valid oversized load permit. Driving outside the permitted route, failing to use required escort vehicles, or traveling without a valid permit at all converts a legal move into a violation.
- **GPS And Routing Software Failures:** Commercial fleets increasingly rely on routing software to navigate. Civilian GPS applications don't filter for bridge clearances, and [truck navigation app crashes](#) are a recurring problem when carriers hand a driver an unsuitable tool.

- **Pre-Trip Inspection Failures:** Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration regulations require drivers to complete pre-trip inspections that include cargo securement and load height. A driver who skips or rushes this step, and a carrier that doesn't enforce the standard, share responsibility for what happens next.

Federal Height Standards and the Carrier's Duty to Route Safely

Georgia's limit mirrors the federal baseline established under [23 C.F.R. Part 658](#), which governs truck size and weight on the National Network. Federal standards don't set a single national height cap. They do, however, establish the framework through which states set their own limits and manage clearance on the roads that connect them. Georgia's 13.5-foot rule sits squarely within that framework.

The carrier's routing obligation goes deeper than just picking a road. When a truck is operating near or above height limits, the carrier has a duty to verify the clearance of every route segment before dispatch. That duty isn't satisfied by relying on the driver's memory or a consumer navigation app.

Carriers with a history of overheight incidents and no documented routing protocols face heightened scrutiny in litigation, and Georgia courts have seen cases where that evidence was decisive.

Take a driver hauling an overheight steel beam through northern Georgia and dispatched on a state route without a clearance check. The dispatching company's system doesn't include bridge height data, and the driver strikes an overpass with 12.8-foot clearance. Vehicles traveling behind take the brunt of the falling debris. That scenario repeats across Georgia far more often than the public realizes, and [dispatch pressure](#) sits at the heart of most of them.

Multiple Parties May Be Responsible for a Single Bridge Strike

One of the defining features of overheight truck crash litigation is that liability rarely rests with just one party. When investigators pull the full picture, the responsible chain often includes several actors:

- **The Truck Driver:** The driver has an independent obligation to know the vehicle's height, read posted clearance signs, and refuse to proceed when a route is unsafe. A driver who misses a clearance warning that was clearly posted has contributed to the harm.
- **The Motor Carrier:** The company that operates the truck is responsible for proper dispatch, routing compliance, [truck maintenance records](#), and pre-trip inspection enforcement. Carriers that show a pattern of overheight incidents face punitive exposure when their records surface in litigation.
- **The Freight Broker:** [Freight broker negligence](#) arises when brokers arrange loads without verifying the shipper's load specifications or confirming that the carrier has proper routing protocols in place, particularly when an improperly documented oversize load is at the root of the strike.
- **The Shipper Or Cargo Loader:** When the height violation traces to how cargo was loaded, packed, or secured before it left the warehouse or distribution center, the

shipper carries responsibility that doesn't disappear just because the truck driver's hands were on the wheel.

- **Maintenance And Inspection Contractors:** Third-party contractors who certified a vehicle's dimensions without detecting modifications that pushed it above the legal height may face liability claims of their own.

The Injuries Bridge Strikes Cause and Why the Aftermath Is So Dangerous

A bridge strike is rarely a contained event. The structural impact can cause the trailer to [jackknife](#), spilling cargo across multiple lanes. Vehicles traveling immediately behind the truck take the brunt of falling debris, which can include concrete, steel reinforcement, and the cargo load itself. Drivers and passengers in those following vehicles often have no warning and no time to react.

Common injuries in bridge strike crashes include [traumatic brain injuries](#), back and spinal injuries, crush injuries from structural collapse, and broken bones from secondary impacts. Fatalities in vehicles following an overheight truck are not uncommon, and when a crash is fatal, [Georgia's wrongful death statute](#) gives the surviving family the right to pursue compensation.

Georgia's [SB 68 tort reform law](#) also changed how medical bills are presented and valued in bodily injury cases arising on or after April 21, 2025. Juries now see both the billed amount and the amount insurance actually paid, and decide reasonable value from both. In catastrophic injury cases, that shift materially changes how a claim is built, and it belongs in the settlement conversation from the beginning.

What Investigators Look For After a Bridge Strike

The evidence in a bridge strike case starts disappearing quickly. The trucking company's internal safety team is typically on-site within hours, and their job isn't to preserve evidence for your claim. It's to limit the company's exposure.

The following evidence categories close fast and need preservation demands the same week the crash happens:

- **Electronic Logging Device And Black Box Data:** A truck's [event data recorder](#) captures speed, braking, and vehicle performance data from the moments before and during the crash. This evidence can confirm whether the driver slowed before the overpass or proceeded at highway speed.
- **GPS Route History And Dispatch Communications:** Cell phone records, dispatch logs, and the carrier's routing system data show which route was assigned, whether clearance data was consulted, and whether the driver flagged any concerns before proceeding.
- **Bill Of Lading And Load Certification Documents:** These records establish the legal height the load was certified at and, if the actual height exceeded that number, who knew and when.

- **FMCSA Carrier Safety Records:** The [carrier's federal safety rating](#) and inspection history may show prior overheight violations, hours-of-service infractions, or unresolved safety deficiencies that the company chose not to correct.
- **GDOT Bridge Inspection And Maintenance Records:** Georgia DOT maintains records on every bridge structure, including posted clearance signs, recent inspections, and the structural condition of each span. These records matter both for proving the clearance and for ruling out any pre-existing damage.

Talk To Georgia's Billion Dollar Truck Wreck Lawyer Before The Evidence Is Overwritten

If a truck struck a bridge in Georgia and you or someone you love was hurt in the aftermath that followed, [contact us](#) today for a free evaluation before the carrier's 30-day retention window closes on the electronic data. Our firm has spent more than three decades holding motor carriers accountable in exactly these kinds of dispatch failures, and that work is part of the [\\$1 billion recovered for Georgia families](#) we've built since 1993.

Our firm's arrangement on truck crash claims is straightforward: no retainer at signing, no invoices while the case is pending, and no attorney's fee at all unless we recover money on your behalf.