

Intermodal Chassis Failures and Container Truck Accidents in Georgia

The Trailer Under the Container Can Create a Separate Maintenance and Liability Trail

A shipping container leaving the Port of Savannah doesn't roll down I-16 on its own wheels. The container is locked onto an intermodal chassis, a wheeled frame that becomes part of the commercial vehicle combination once a tractor hooks to it. If the chassis has defective brakes, a damaged tire, cracked frame, failed suspension, bad lighting, or another safety problem, the failure can cause a serious crash even when the tractor itself is mechanically sound.

These wrecks can be more complicated than an ordinary tractor-trailer claim because the motor carrier may not own the chassis. An intermodal equipment provider may control the equipment, a terminal may handle the interchange, a separate company may perform repairs, and a driver may have reported a defect before the trip began.

Our [Georgia truck accident lawyers](#) investigate the entire equipment chain. In a container truck crash, the question isn't simply who was driving. It is who controlled the chassis, who inspected it, who knew about any defect, and whether the equipment should have been released onto a public road at all.

Quick Facts About Intermodal Chassis Failures

- **The Chassis Is Separate Equipment:** A container chassis can be owned or controlled by an intermodal equipment provider rather than the motor carrier hauling the load.
- **Federal Rules Create Shared Safety Duties:** Intermodal equipment providers, motor carriers, and drivers each have inspection, reporting, maintenance, or safe-operation responsibilities.
- **Reported Safety Defects Must Be Addressed:** 49 CFR § 396.12 requires an intermodal equipment provider to repair reported defects likely to affect safe operation before allowing the equipment to be transported again.
- **Annual Inspection Records Matter:** Intermodal equipment intended for interchange must satisfy the periodic inspection requirements in 49 CFR § 396.17.
- **The Equipment Identity Is Critical Evidence:** The chassis number and IEP USDOT information can help identify the company responsible for the equipment and its maintenance records.

What Is an Intermodal Chassis?

An intermodal shipping container is designed to move between ships, rail, and trucks without unloading the cargo each time. For highway movement, the container is mounted on a chassis

equipped with wheels, tires, brakes, suspension, electrical connections, lights, and structural components. Locking mechanisms secure the container to the chassis.

Georgia sees a high volume of this equipment because of the Port of Savannah and the freight routes connecting the port to I-16, I-95, distribution centers, rail facilities, and inland destinations. The concentration of container traffic also creates distinct issues in [Port of Savannah freight corridor accidents](#), where several transportation companies may control different parts of the freight movement.

Which Chassis Defects Can Cause a Container Truck Crash?

A chassis can fail in ways that affect braking, stability, visibility, or the driver's ability to keep the container under control. Important defects can include:

- **Brake Defects:** Out-of-adjustment brakes, air leaks, damaged brake components, or other defects can reduce braking performance across the combination vehicle.
- **Tire and Wheel Problems:** Underinflated or damaged tires, loose wheel fasteners, cracked rims, or bearing problems can lead to blowouts, wheel loss, or sudden instability.
- **Frame or Structural Damage:** Cracks, corrosion, damaged crossmembers, or other structural problems can compromise the chassis under a loaded container.
- **Suspension and Axle Defects:** Broken springs, damaged air suspension, worn components, or axle problems can affect tracking, load distribution, and control.
- **Lighting and Electrical Failures:** Bad connectors, damaged wiring, or missing trailer lights can make a container chassis difficult to see or make braking and turning signals unavailable.
- **Container Securement Problems:** Damaged or improperly engaged locking components can create a risk that the container shifts or separates from the chassis.

Federal Rules Put Maintenance Duties on Intermodal Equipment Providers

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration treats intermodal equipment providers, or IEPs, as part of the commercial vehicle safety system. FMCSA explains that IEPs must [systematically inspect, repair, and maintain intermodal equipment](#) intended for interchange and keep systems for defect reports and maintenance records.

Under [49 CFR § 396.12](#), an IEP must have a system for drivers and motor carriers to report damage, defects, or deficiencies that affect safe operation or could cause a mechanical breakdown. When a reported defect is likely to affect safe operation, the provider must repair it before allowing the chassis to be transported again, or certify that repair is unnecessary.

The annual inspection requirement also applies to intermodal equipment. [49 CFR § 396.17](#) generally requires each component of the commercial vehicle combination to have passed a

periodic inspection within the preceding 12 months, including intermodal equipment intended for interchange.

Those rules matter after a crash because they create records. A chassis shouldn't be an anonymous piece of metal that appeared under a container. The equipment identity, inspection history, defect reports, repair certifications, and maintenance documents can show what was known before the wreck.

The Driver and Motor Carrier Still Have Safety Responsibilities

IEP duties don't eliminate the responsibilities of the driver or motor carrier. A driver taking possession of intermodal equipment needs a reasonable opportunity to inspect the chassis, and safety defects discovered during use need to be reported. A motor carrier can't treat a dangerous chassis as someone else's problem simply because it doesn't own the equipment.

That shared responsibility is one reason the investigation has to identify who did what. Did the driver notice a flat tire or air leak and continue? Did the carrier dispatch the load after learning about a defect? Did the IEP receive a report and return the chassis to service without a repair? Did a maintenance contractor perform work incorrectly? The answers can place fault in different parts of the transportation chain.

Who May Be Liable When the Chassis Fails?

There is no automatic answer. Potential responsibility can depend on control, notice, contracts, and the specific failure. Parties worth investigating may include the intermodal equipment provider, motor carrier, driver, maintenance contractor, chassis owner or lessor, terminal operator, and, in a true product-defect case, a manufacturer or component supplier.

Determining [who can be liable after a Georgia truck accident](#) often requires looking beyond the person behind the wheel. In an intermodal case, the chassis paperwork can add another layer.

Maintenance Records Can Show Whether the Failure Was Preventable

A broken component after a crash doesn't automatically prove poor maintenance. Investigators need to determine whether the part failed before impact, was damaged by the collision, or had a known defect that should have been corrected earlier.

That's why [truck maintenance records](#) can become so important. For an intermodal chassis, relevant documents can include periodic inspection reports, defect reports, repair certifications, work orders, tire records, brake inspections, road-service calls, prior roadside inspections, and communications between the driver, carrier, terminal, and IEP.

Evidence That Can Identify the Chassis and Its History

A container truck crash should be investigated before the equipment is repaired, moved to another terminal, or returned to service. Useful evidence can include:

- **Chassis Identification:** The unique chassis number, IEP markings, and USDOT information can identify the equipment provider and the correct maintenance file.
- **Interchange and Gate Records:** Terminal records can show when the chassis was tendered, which carrier took it, and when it entered or left the facility.
- **Driver Defect Reports:** Reports can establish whether a problem was noticed before or during the trip and what response followed.
- **Periodic Inspection and Repair Records:** These can show recurring brake, tire, wheel, suspension, lighting, or structural problems.
- **Post-Crash Physical Inspection:** Photographs, measurements, component preservation, and qualified mechanical inspection can help distinguish pre-crash failure from collision damage.
- **Tractor and Electronic Data:** ECM, telematics, GPS, and braking data can show how the tractor was being operated when the chassis problem developed.

A lawyer can send preservation notices to the different companies that control those records. Acting quickly to [preserve evidence after a Georgia truck accident](#) can keep physical and electronic proof from disappearing before it can be examined.

What to Do Right Away After a Container Truck Crash

1. **Photograph Identifying Numbers:** If it can be done safely, photographs of the tractor, container, chassis number, trailer markings, and USDOT information can help identify every company involved.
2. **Save the Police Exchange Information:** The carrier name on the cab may not identify the chassis provider, so every document and photograph can matter.
3. **Don't Assume the Carrier Owns the Trailer Equipment:** Intermodal equipment frequently changes hands, which is why contracts and interchange records need to be traced.
4. **Preserve the Physical Chassis:** Repairing, scrapping, or returning the chassis to service before inspection can eliminate evidence of the defect.
5. **• Get Legal Help Early:** A truck accident attorney can send preservation demands to the carrier, IEP, terminal, maintenance company, and other entities before records are routinely lost.

A Chassis Failure Claim Has to Connect the Defect to the Crash

A safety violation or bad inspection history can be important, but the claim still needs causation. If a tire defect is alleged, the evidence should show how that tire failure contributed to loss of control. If brakes are at issue, the mechanical findings and electronic data should fit the driver's braking sequence. If a frame defect is alleged, an engineer may need to determine whether the damage existed before impact.

That precision matters when several defendants begin blaming each other. The IEP may blame the driver for missing an obvious defect. The carrier may blame the IEP for tendering unsafe equipment. A maintenance company may argue that the component was damaged after its last service. The physical evidence and records have to sort those positions out.

Georgia Container Truck Cases Need the Whole Equipment Chain

Intermodal trucking is built around interchange. The tractor, chassis, container, cargo, terminal, carrier, and equipment provider can all come from different parts of the logistics system. That efficiency shouldn't make safety responsibility disappear when equipment fails on a Georgia highway.

[Gary Martin Hays & Associates](#) has represented Georgia families since 1993 and has recovered more than \$1 billion for injured clients. In a complex freight case, we can identify the companies involved, preserve the chassis and records, retain qualified technical professionals when needed, and build the liability timeline before the equipment is put back into circulation.

If you were injured in a container truck or intermodal chassis crash in Georgia, [contact us](#) for a free consultation. We handle truck accident claims on a contingency fee basis, meaning you don't pay anything unless we recover compensation for you.