ebook

7 tips for improving CSA scores

verizon connect

What is CSA?

Compliance, Safety, Accountability Score, or CSA, is a Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) initiative to improve safety and reduce commercial motor vehicle (CMV) related crashes, injuries and fatalities.

CSA is a data-driven safety compliance and enforcement program introduced to improve the efficiency of Department of Transportation (DOT) auditors by allowing them to focus on more 'at risk' carriers.

Data collected over the last 24 months (from crash reports, roadside inspections and DOT interventions) is used to calculate a carrier's score.

Scores are shown as a percentage (relative to other, similar carriers) with 0% being the best and 100% the worst. The DOT normally instigates an intervention program around 80% (which means the carrier has a CSA score worse than 80%).

Visit the CSA website at https://csa.fmcsa.dot.gov/ for more information on the methodology for calculating CSA scores.

Why is it important to care about your CSA score?

Improving your CSA score can benefit you, your drivers and other stakeholders. CSA scores are public, which means carriers with higher scores are often preferred by customers and subject to fewer DOT audits or roadside inspections. It can also mean lower insurance premiums, which can save you thousands every year.

Recruiting good drivers is often easier since most drivers want to work for a firm that has a good reputation. Aside from keeping a fleet compliant, the overriding reason for taking your CSA score seriously should be a continual striving as a company to provide a good working environment for your team so they get home to their families safely at the end of the day.

What's your current CSA score? Is it improving or getting worse? The good news is that a bad score is not permanent. The bad news is that a good score can just as easily take a turn for the worse.

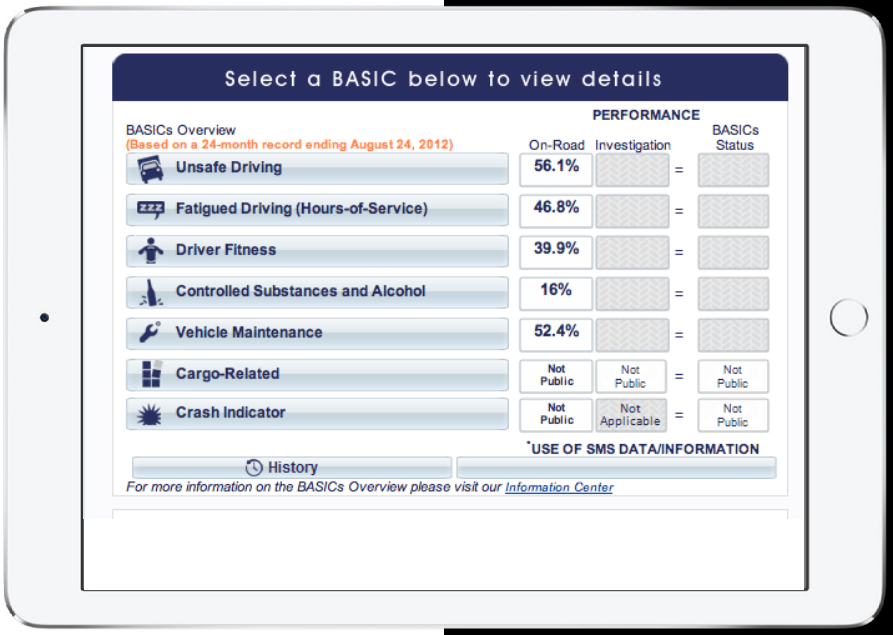
No matter where you are currently ranked, you need to be paying constant attention to your CSA score.

What makes up my CSA score?

A CSA score is a rating made up of any violations counted against a carrier over the last 24 months.

There are over 700 different violations but they all fit into one of the following 7 categories, referred to as Behavioral Analysis Safety Improvement Categories (BASIC).

- **Unsafe driving**
  Speeding, reckless driving, improper lane change and inattention
- **HOS compliance**
  Hours of Service (HOS) logbook and operating a commercial vehicle while ill or fatigued
- **Driver fitness**
  Failure to have a valid and appropriate commercial driver's license and being medically unqualified to operate a commercial vehicle
- **Controlled substances/ alcohol**
  Use or possession of controlled substances/alcohol
- **Vehicle maintenance** Brakes, lights, and other mechanical defects and failure to make required repairs
- **Cargo-related**
  Improper load securement, cargo retention, and hazardous material handling
- **Crash indicators**
  Histories or patterns of high crash involvement, including frequency and severity



Here are seven tips to improve your CSA score

These guidelines are designed to be practices that become an integral part of your fleet's culture, and should not be considered a quick fix. This can help you to achieve and maintain a good CSA score.

If you don't know your current CSA score visit the official website and search by carrier name or USDOT number.

Check now ›

Tip #1

Verify your data

It's important to verify your inspection data is correct and that the only bad inspections on your record are valid, accurate and warranted.

Challenge incorrect inspection data

Review your inspection data online at https://dataqs.fmcsa.dot.gov and make sure it is correct, including basic information such as the driver and vehicle belonging to your fleet.

If you wish to challenge inspection data (referred to as an RDR – Request for Data Review), keep in mind the following points:

- Have clear factual evidence for why you feel the data is incorrect
- Clearly list issues such as missing records, incorrect information or duplications
- Remember that the review officer is likely a peer of the officer who made the original notation
- Provide supporting documentation including ELD records, photos and eyewitness accounts
- Make sure chassis violations are assigned to the chassis carrier

You have up to two years to challenge inspection data.

Keep carrier registration data up-to-date

Carriers under CSA are required to complete a MCS-150 form at least once every two years (as well as when they first start trading). This form must be completed even if you have stopped trading, no longer travel interstate or your information hasn't changed. If you don't you can be fined up to $10,000 and deactivation of your USDOT number.

Update your truck and driver numbers, but particularly your mileage. Keep it as high as possible, obviously without falsifying the data.

Tip #2

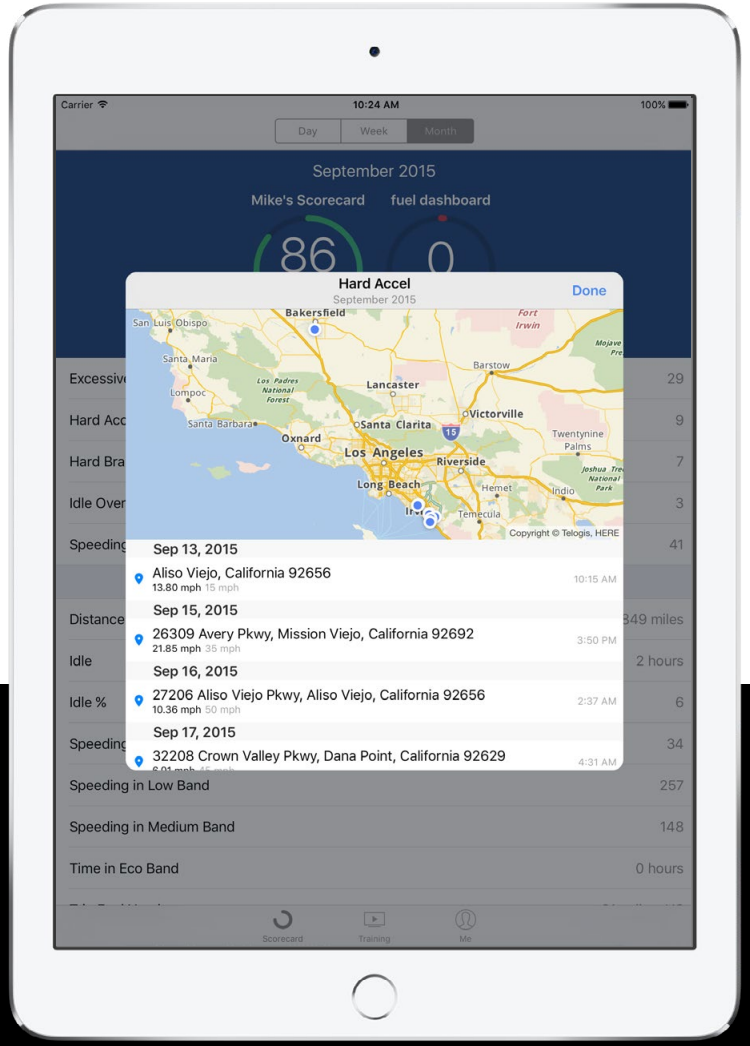
Establish management controls

The purpose of DOT's Safety Management Cycle is to verify whether managers have adequate safety management controls. That means you need to establish roles and responsibilities, including defining standards for hiring drivers.

If somebody is not performing like they should, then you as a manager need to do something about it. Some fleets have a three-strike process. Whatever your policy, be consistent, firm but fair.

Make sure your management controls are in order before looking at safety issues with your drivers.

Before looking at your drivers make sure you have clear policies established and commitment from all managers to practice what they preach about company safety standards. To learn more about the Safety Management Cycle review the online resources from the DOT.



Tip #3

Hire good drivers

An overview of the driver selection process typically looks like this:

- Recruit to your standards
- Screen candidates
- Review and verify references
- Check driving records
- Interview
- Operations-fit interview
- Tentative offer pending
- Orientation
- Mentoring

Remember the rule of thumb when hiring:
Past behavior is a strong predictor of future behavior.

Set high standards and screen for the candidate that will help not hurt, your CSA score.

Tip #4

Dispatch within limits

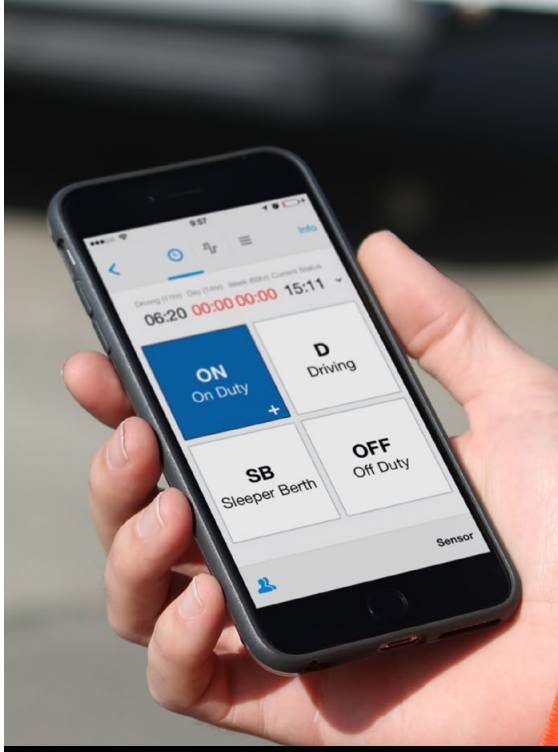
Staying CSA compliant is not just the sole responsibility of drivers.

Dispatch workers and the driver's manager need to do their part too. One of the key areas is knowing and complying with Hours of Service (HOS) regulations as defined in regulation 395.3 (it varies depending on the type of commercial driving you're doing, e.g. bus driving).

It has to be clear that these rules are non-negotiable for everyone who works for you — if they don't get it or aren't willing to comply then they're not a good fit for your business. Dispatchers need to make sure they're not overloading drivers beyond their legal limits and drivers need to make sure they're taking their required breaks and maintaining their logs.

Hours of Service Limits (395.3)

- 11 hours of driving after 10 hours rest
- No driving after the 14th hour after coming on-duty (consecutive)
- Except for short haul drivers, no driving permitted after 8th consecutive hour after the end of a 30-minute off-duty or sleeper-berth period
- No driving after being on-duty 60/70 hours in 7/8 days
- Reset to zero after 34 hours off if:
  - At least 168 hours after beginning of last qualified 34-hour period
  - Two periods from 1am to 5am must be within break



Solution spotlight: Automated, electronic HOS

Maintaining paperwork or manually calculating driving hours remaining is not fun for anyone but there's an easy way to remove that chore from your driver's working day while staying compliant.

ELDs, legally required since December 2017, are electronic black boxes hardwired into the truck to automatically record driving events. Tied to a unique ID, they can quickly show a driver (or roadside inspector) remaining driving hours and an up-to-date log of activity.

Tip #5

Maintain your vehicles: PM, Pre-trip and DVIR

It's vital that you have a PM (Preventive Maintenance) program and do systematic maintenance on all of your vehicles, trucks, trailers and dollies.

Your drivers should be well-trained to do pre-trip inspections. The best way to train them is to show them exactly how to do it. How long they spend on an inspection is a matter of company policy but set high standards and then hold employees accountable.

Inspections: What's required by law?

Federal regulations 396.13 state that before driving a motor vehicle, the driver shall:

(a) Be satisfied that the motor vehicle is in safe operating condition;

(b) Review the last driver vehicle inspection report; and

(c) Sign the report, only if defects or deficiencies were noted by the driver who prepared the report, to acknowledge that the driver has reviewed it and that there is a certification that the required repairs have been performed. The signature requirement does not apply to listed defects on a towed unit which is no longer part of the vehicle combination.

Secure your cargo properly

Stuff falling off trucks causes deaths every year so cargo securement should be taken seriously by your drivers. It's also highly visible so if cargo isn't securely tied down the chances of getting pulled over are high, and a sure way to damage your CSA score.

When you put anything on any vehicle, even a box truck or a reefer, it cannot move. It's got to be blocked and braced, and tied down.

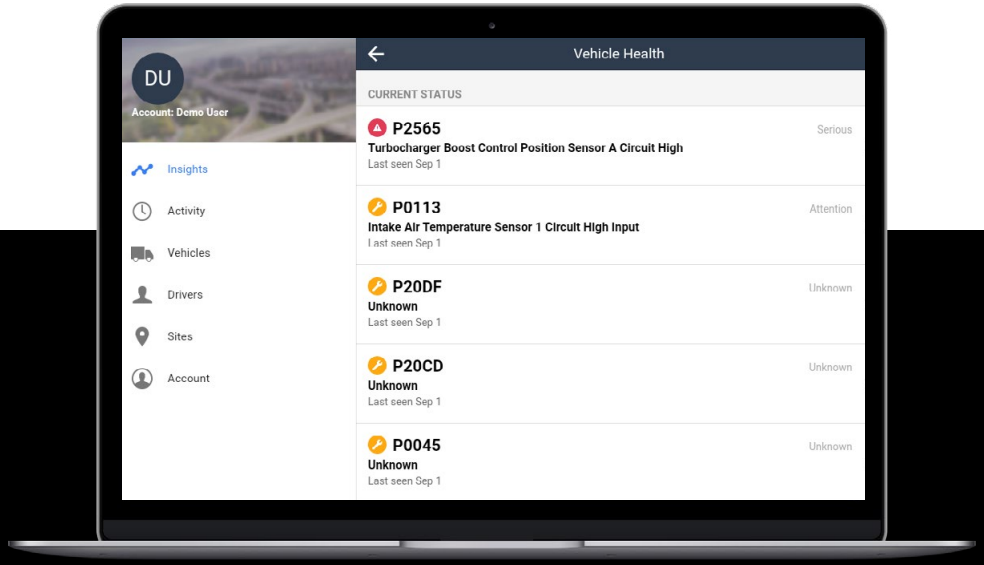
Schedule A or B – what's the difference?

Schedule A is essentially a pre-trip inspection performed by a mechanic and will generally be done once a month. However, the more often you can get a mechanic on a vehicle, the less likely the officer on the road is going to find something wrong.

Schedule B is sometimes referred to as a wet service and generally relates to keeping the oil healthy. Some built-in telematics platforms offer oil life as a diagnostic data point that can help automate scheduling of oil changes.

Annual inspections, on all your equipment should be a standard operating procedure for your fleet - every vehicle, every truck, every trailer, every dolly has to be inspected at least once a year.

After an annual inspection update the decal on the vehicle and keep the inspection on file for 14 months. Make it a policy to never allow any vehicle on the road with an inspection date older than 12 months.



Tip #6

Train your team to comply with HazMat regulations

If your fleet transports hazardous materials then you and your drivers should be thoroughly familiar with the Hazardous Materials Regulations (HMR) – it's likely to come up during a compliance review or roadside inspection.

Since fleets qualified to carry HazMat are required to have a better CSA score than regular cargo carriers it makes it even more important to pay attention to the following protocol for transporting dangerous goods.

Common issues that your team need to be trained on include:

- Are HazMat goods classified and packaged correctly?
- Does it have shipping papers?
- Does it need markings, labels, or placards?
- Is an emergency response guide kept in the vehicle?

If you're not already familiar with the DOT's HazMat regulations you can learn more online at **fmcsa.dot.gov/regulations/hazardous-materials.**

Solution spotlight: Route compliance

HazMat drivers caught transporting on restricted routes can hurt your CSA score and incur costly fines. Verizon Connect offers commercial-grade navigation that can help you comply with truck-legal routes, providing turn-by-turn directions specific to the truck's size and load type.

Learn more ›

Tip #7

Have an effective safety committee

Not all carriers have a safety committee but it's an excellent way to keep your fleet safety-conscious and learning from mistakes.

The job of the safety committee is to figure out if an accident could have been prevented. Dig deep to learn the root cause. It's not just because you're worried about your CSA score – it's about keeping your drivers safe.

Don't do it just for show either - for a safety committee to be effective it needs to have the authority to make company-wide changes and hold everyone accountable.

Sometimes it means letting drivers go who are just not cut out for the job. If any of your drivers are repeatedly having accidents then they need to be moved on, as much for their own safety as anyone else's.

Make a commitment to start today

The best place to start is with an assessment. Identify the areas that are weak and write procedures to strengthen them. With strong procedures in place it's time to establish systems to make sure everyone, from the top down, is following procedure. Put the emphasis on training rather than discipline.

To learn more, visit at verizonconnect.com or call 866.844.2235.

You might also like:

- Fleet vehicle compliance managemet guide
- International roadcheck checklist

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