



DOT roadside inspections

Following federal DOT safety regulations is not only the law, but also good business. It provides safe, road-worthy vehicles that protect your employees, the motoring public, your business and reputation.

There are as many as 3.5 million roadside inspections conducted annually in the United States as part of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) safety management program. These inspections are used by the FMCSA to collect data and grade motor carriers as part of the compliance, safety and accountability (CSA) program. Every roadside inspection, with or without violations, is factored into the carrier's and driver's CSA performance. Violations remain on the carrier's score for 24 months and driver's score for 36 months.

TYPES OF INSPECTIONS

There are seven types of roadside inspections. The vast majority of inspections fall under the first three levels:

Level I North American Standard Inspection. This inspection includes examination of:

- Driver's license.
- Medical examiner's certificate and skill performance evaluation (SPE) certificate.
- Alcohol and drugs.
- Driver's record of duty status (hours of service).
- Seat belt.
- Vehicle inspection report.
- Brake systems.
- Coupling devices.
- Exhaust systems.
- Frames.
- Fuel systems.
- Lighting devices (headlamps, tail lamps, stop lamps, turn signals).
- Cargo securement.
- Steering mechanisms.
- Suspensions.
- Tires.
- Van and open-top trailer bodies.
- Wheels, rims and hubs.
- Windshield wipers.
- Emergency exits and/or electrical cables.
- Systems in engine and battery compartments.

Level II Walk-Around Driver/Vehicle Inspection.

This includes the same items of a Level I inspection, which can be inspected without physically getting under the vehicle.

Level III Driver/Credential Inspection.

This inspection includes examination of:

- Driver's license.
- Medical examiner's certificate.
- Driver's record of duty status (hours of service).
- Seat belt.
- Vehicle inspection report.

Level IV Special Inspection.

This typically includes a one-time examination of a particular item. These examinations are normally made in support of a study or to verify or refute a suspected trend.

Level V Vehicle-Only Inspection.

This inspection includes each of the vehicle inspection items specified under Level I, without a driver present, conducted at any location.

Level VI Inspection for Transuranic Waste and Highway Route Controlled Quantities (HRCQ) of Radioactive Material.

Level VII Jurisdictional Mandated Commercial Vehicle Inspection.

This level can be an inspection of the vehicle, driver, or both.



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VIOLATIONS

Only specially trained FMCSA officials can perform inspections and issue citations.

Violations fall into seven behavioral analysis and safety improvement categories (BASIC):

- Unsafe driving.
- DOT-reportable crashes.
- Hours of service.
- Vehicle maintenance.
- Controlled substances and alcohol.
- Hazardous materials compliance.
- Driver fitness.

Commercial motor vehicles with defects likely to cause an accident or breakdown are placed out of service to prevent operation until the conditions are corrected. Out-of-service violations are defined as any condition for an item that does not meet the regulation for that item (i.e. steer tires with a tread depth less than 2/32”).

The top 10 out-of-service violations for vehicles and drivers in 2022 included:

Vehicles

1. Tire flat or audible air leak.
2. Brakes out of service: The number of defective brakes is equal to or greater than 20% of the service breaks on the vehicle or combination.
3. Inoperative turn signal.
4. No/improper breakaway or emergency breaking.
5. Flat tire or fabric exposed.
6. Inoperative brake lamps.
7. Inoperable required lamp.
8. Inoperable, repair and maintenance violation.
9. Brake tubing and hose inadequacy.
10. Axle positioning parts defective/missing.

Drivers

1. Commercial driver's license violation.
2. False report of driver's record of duty status.
3. No record of duty status (ELD required).
4. No record of duty status when one is required (ELD not required).
5. General qualifications of drivers.
6. Failing to retain previous seven days' records of duty status.
7. Does not have a valid operator's license for the CMV operated.
8. False record of duty status: Improper use of personal conveyance exception.
9. Physical qualifications for drivers.
10. Prohibited from performing safety-sensitive functions in the drug and alcohol clearinghouse.

Penalties for ignoring out-of-service violations can be severe. Drivers can have their license suspended for 90 days on the first offense. Fines can be up to \$1,800 for drivers and \$18,000 for the carrier. The Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA) is a nonprofit organization comprised of local, state and federal commercial safety officials whose mission is to prevent commercial motor vehicles crashes, injuries and fatalities. They have developed an out-of-service criteria and critical inspection program that can be downloaded at cvsa.org.



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KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL INSPECTION

Training is crucial for preparing drivers to successfully navigate a roadside inspection. New hire and refresher training for drivers should include how to complete a thorough pre- and post-trip inspection. Carriers should have a system in place to repair any defects found during a pre-trip inspection before the vehicle is allowed to go on-road. The importance of a driver's attitude cannot be understated. Drivers should be coached to remain calm, respectful and to avoid arguing or confronting the inspecting officer. Drivers can ask the inspector to explain violations and the specifics surrounding the deficiency.

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