Monitoring your DOT SMS Scores or Data

Your commercial vehicle just got pulled over by a state, county, or local law enforcement official while on the road. The stop could have been made for ANY reason, ranging from speeding to load securement to lights not working on the vehicle. After reviewing the vehicle and the driver, the officer indicates what the citation is for, then places the vehicle, driver, or both out of service. Now what happens?

The violations issued eventually find their way into the Safety and Fitness Electronic Records (SAFER) System and Safety Measurement System (SMS). Data from completed inspections is broken out by category, number of inspections completed, and if an out-of-service violation was issued. Violations can fall within seven categories:

- Unsafe Driving
- Crash
- Driver Fitness
- Hours of Service
- Vehicle Maintenance
- Controlled Substances
- Hazardous Materials

Company accident history, for accidents that are DOT reportable, is also available on both systems.

How often one of your trucks gets pulled over and the type of inspection completed is based, in part, on your inspection, out of service, and accident history.

Both systems are free to the public to review without a password. Current or prospective customers, insurance carriers, and attorneys may obtain this information in just a few clicks. Searches can be made using a USDOT number or carrier name.

How often are your reviewing your data?

At a minimum, inspection data should be reviewed once each month. Scores change and are updated near the end of each month. Recent inspections are included in your scores and older inspections roll off your record after two years. Scores are developed from a rolling two-year scorecard that can get better or worse based on the type and severity of inspections or accidents that occurred.

Violations and crashes are severity weighted on a scale of 1 to 10, with one being low and 10 being high. Cell phone violations while driving have a severity weighting of 10 for the entire two years. Severity weightings for other violations fall over two years. Any out-of-service violation from the inspection increases the severity weighting by two points.

Tips to manage your DOT inspection scores

Vehicle maintenance violations are the most common types of violations companies receive. These range from tires to brakes to lights not working. Many of these issues can be addressed during a pre-trip inspection. Are your drivers completing inspections consistently? Are the issues identified in inspections being corrected?

What's your company's procedure when a violation is issued? Drivers need to turn in the original inspection report when they return to the terminal or yard. Even clean inspection reports should be turned in. Inspection reports need to be reviewed against inspection data to verify no errors in inspection data.

NOTE: If a driver is more than 24 hours from a terminal, it can be mailed in. A photo can also be sent and forwarded by mail, e-mail, or text.

Ensure repairs are made to the vehicle and the report is signed by the mechanic. Return a copy of the report, including the repairs made, to the issuing agency and keep a copy in your file for one year.

Are you using the data Q system to challenge a violation?

This system allows you to select and track data from the FMCSA that you feel may be incomplete or incorrect. It can for crashes by both motor carriers and drivers. DataQ is an on-line system that requires an account and use of your portal user ID and password to access the system. Some challenges are successful, others are not, depending on the citation. Documentation is a key element in successful challenges, including being able to cite chapter and verse of the regulations that were violated.

Are you holding annual reviews with employees to review citations received and correcting citations that were reduced in court via a successful DataQ challenge?

Reviewing your DOT inspection data each month helps keep your fleet moving and not bogged down with frequent inspections based on your last two years of inspection data. Inspections result in down time for the driver and unit. Poor ongoing results can negatively impact company revenues. With the rolling results of FMCSA and SMS, it takes time to correct the past. Shouldn't we get started sooner rather than later?

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