

FMCSA Desk Operating System

FMCSA data is not a green light. It is a set of clocks, evidence trails, and incomplete observations that must be read together.

787,189	418,526	3.01M	24 months
active regulated carriers in the December 2023 FMCSA snapshot	carriers reporting one power unit	federal and state inspections in 2023	standard SMS inspection and crash lookback

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A single status field is never enough. Registration, operating authority, insurance filings, safety history, new entrant age, and current identity evidence answer different questions.

The public system changed in May 2026. Motus now carries current registration activity, while the former Licensing and Insurance system is historical-only and does not reflect new Motus filings.

Use the seven papers in this library as one workflow: confirm identity, confirm authority, measure history, test operational feasibility, preserve evidence, then monitor changes.

01 The carrier universe is large, small, and noisy

FMCSA counted 787,189 active interstate carriers and intrastate hazardous materials carriers in its December 2023 snapshot. More than half reported one power unit. That structure matters: a clean-looking record may mean strong performance, limited exposure, or simply not enough inspections to form a stable view.

The 2024 Pocket Guide reports more than three million inspections in 2023. It also reports 222,041 driver out-of-service violations and 678,529 vehicle out-of-service violations. The lesson is not that every violation predicts a bad load. The lesson is that the inspection system produces a deep evidence trail, and the trail must be read at the right denominator.

- No inspection history is not the same as good inspection history.
- One old violation is not the same as a recent pattern.
- A current authority record is not the same as verified identity.
- A filed policy is not the same as confirmed coverage for the load.

Evidence: 2024 Pocket Guide to Large Truck and Bus Statistics

02 Seven decisions, seven different evidence layers

A reliable load decision separates seven questions that teams often collapse into one yes-or-no carrier check. Each layer can stop the booking. Passing one layer never waives the next.

Decision	Primary evidence	What it cannot prove
Who is this entity	Motus record, legal name, address, verified contact path	That the person tendering the truck controls the entity
Can it legally operate	Current registration and operating authority status	That authority was never borrowed or impersonated
Is required financial responsibility filed	Current Motus filing record and direct insurer confirmation	Cargo terms, exclusions, or policy validity for this shipment
How much safety history exists	SAFER, inspections, new entrant window, SMS	Future performance or complete private detail
Can this driver run the schedule	Driver clock, route plan, appointment math	Unexpected weather, detention, or road closure
Is the record accurate	Inspection report, citation disposition, DataQs evidence	That every state record has already synchronized
Can the load stay secure	Equipment, cargo, blocking, bracing, tiedown plan	That loading will match the plan without photos and checks

Evidence: Move into Motus, New Entrant Safety Assurance Program, Safety Measurement System Methodology: BASIC Prioritization Status, Version 3.21, Interstate Truck Driver's Guide to Hours of Service, Revised DataQs Requirements for Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Program Grant Funding, Cargo Securement Rules

03 Use a stoplight only after the evidence stack

A stoplight is an output, not a method. Build the file first. The safest sequence is identity, legal authority, insurance verification, history depth, operating feasibility, load-specific controls, and ongoing monitoring.

This order prevents a common failure: letting a familiar carrier name or an active status override a new phone number, mismatched email domain, impossible hours-of-service plan, or unexplained insurance change.

1. Resolve the USDOT record and legal entity in Motus.
2. Confirm that the tendering contact came through a known and independently verified path.
3. Confirm authority and required financial filings in the current system.
4. Read new entrant age, inspection counts, out-of-service history, and SMS with denominators.
5. Test the schedule against driver hours and expected dwell.
6. Document equipment, cargo securement, and load-specific requirements.
7. Save the evidence and recheck material changes before dispatch.

Evidence: Move into Motus, What can I do in Licensing and Insurance, Safety Measurement System Methodology: BASIC Prioritization Status, Version 3.21, Frequently Asked Questions: Prohibited Coercion of Commercial Motor Vehicle Drivers

04 The library is designed around failure points

The papers do not retell federal regulations in chapter order. They start where freight teams get hurt: a stale registration screen, a young authority with little history, a percentile without context, an appointment that only works if the driver breaks the clock, a bond notice that sits in an inbox, a bad inspection record that never gets challenged, or a load plan with no securement evidence.

Paper	Decision it improves	Companion tool
Carrier Vetting After Motus	Which public record is current	Carrier authority decoder
The First 18 Months	How to treat limited carrier history	Carrier authority decoder
Read SMS Without Fooling Yourself	How to interpret relative safety signals	Double-brokering red flag scorer
The Dispatch Clock Is a Safety Control	Whether the load can run legally	HOS clock calculator
The Three Broker Bond Clocks	How to respond before suspension	Carrier insurance minimum lookup
When the Safety Record Is Wrong	How to preserve and challenge evidence	Freight claim package checklist
The Load Must Stay Put	How to document cargo securement	Tiedown calculator

Evidence: Move into Motus, New Entrant Safety Assurance Program, Safety Measurement System Methodology: BASIC Prioritization Status, Version 3.21, Interstate Truck Driver's Guide to Hours of Service, Notifications and Responses to FMCSA by Surety and Trust Providers, Brokers and Freight Forwarders, DataQs Help Center, Cargo Securement Rules

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Turn the seven-step evidence sequence into a required carrier file checklist.
2. Assign an owner and response clock for Motus, bond, insurance, and DataQs notices.
3. Train dispatchers to reject schedules that depend on an hours-of-service violation or a driver threat.

QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING NEXT

- Which carrier fields are copied into your TMS today, and which are rechecked before each load?
- Who is accountable when the public record changes after setup but before pickup?

LIMITS AND CAUTIONS

- FMCSA guidance explains agency rules and programs but is not a substitute for current regulations, contracts, insurer confirmation, or legal advice.
- The national statistics in the 2024 Pocket Guide mostly reflect 2022 and 2023 data. They describe the system, not a specific carrier.
- Public data can lag events. Direct confirmation and saved evidence remain necessary.

PRIMARY PUBLIC SOURCES

1. 2024 Pocket Guide to Large Truck and Bus Statistics

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration | 2025-07

2. Safety Measurement System Methodology: BASIC Prioritization Status, Version 3.21

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration | 2026-06

3. Move into Motus

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration | 2026-05-18

4. What can I do in Licensing and Insurance

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration | 2026-05-21

5. New Entrant Safety Assurance Program

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration | 2022-05-31

6. Interstate Truck Driver's Guide to Hours of Service

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration | 2022-04-28

7. Frequently Asked Questions: Prohibited Coercion of Commercial Motor Vehicle Drivers

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration | 2026-04-28

8. Notifications and Responses to FMCSA by Surety and Trust Providers, Brokers and Freight Forwarders

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration | 2025-11-24

9. Revised DataQs Requirements for Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Program Grant Funding

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration | 2026-04-15

10. Cargo Securement Rules

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration | current program page

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