

JAY JOHNSON & ASSOCIATES, LLC

COMMERCIAL VEHICLE SAFETY

COMPLIANCE BITES



Understanding Safety Ratings: What They Mean for Your Operation

In the world of transportation, safety ratings are a crucial measure of a carrier's compliance with federal safety standards. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) assigns these ratings based on roadside inspections and data gathered through their rigorous evaluation process. But how exactly does the FMCSA rate a carrier, and what do these ratings mean for your business?

Several factors can influence your safety rating, including vehicle maintenance, driver fitness, unsafe driving, hours of service, controlled substance/alcohol violations, hazmat, and accident history. Poor vehicle maintenance, such as neglected repairs or inadequate inspections, can lead to a lower rating. Driver fitness issues, such as unqualified or improperly licensed drivers, also negatively affect your rating. Violations of hours-of-service regulations, which are designed to prevent driver fatigue, can severely impact your score as well. Accidents and safety incidents, particularly those that indicate a pattern of unsafe practices, can also lead to a spike in that compliance category. Those compliance categories are called CSA BASICs, or Behavior Analysis and Safety Improvement Categories, and are a set of seven categories that are used to compare motor carriers to each other. Each category, or BASIC, has a threshold score. If you cross that threshold due to poor roadside inspections, you will be notified and may be subject to an inspection of your operations and intervention. After an inspection, also called a Compliance Review, the FMCSA assigns a rating—Satisfactory, Conditional, or Unsatisfactory—based on how well your operation meets safety regulations. These ratings directly affect your ability to operate, your standing within the industry, and it impacts your ability to obtain insurance.

To ensure your safety rating remains favorable, it's important to regularly review your safety scores through the FMCSA's Safety Measurement System (SMS). Monitoring your compliance, addressing any deficiencies promptly, and continuously improving your safety practices are essential steps to maintaining a strong rating. Staying proactive can help prevent potential issues and keep your operation running smoothly. If you are listed as "Not Rated," it means the FMCSA has not yet assigned a rating due to insufficient data, or you are a new carrier without an inspection. The FMCSA considers "Not Rated" as equal to a "Satisfactory" rating.

In conclusion, understanding and managing your FMCSA safety rating is key to your business's success, customer retention, and insurability. Stay informed, review your ratings regularly, and take necessary actions to maintain compliance. If you need expert guidance on navigating safety ratings, reach out to Jay Johnson Associates, LLC. We're here to help you ensure your operation remains safe, compliant, and on the road to success.

Use this hyperlink to the FMCSA for more information on the rating program:

<https://csa.fmcsa.dot.gov/About/Measure>