Fleet Manager's Field Guide

A Practical Guide to FMCSA Compliance

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Disclaimer

This guide is intended for informational and training purposes only. It is designed to assist fleet managers, safety officers, and compliance personnel in understanding and applying the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSRs).

This document does not constitute legal advice, nor is it intended to replace official regulatory guidance issued by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), or your state or local agencies.

Users are advised to consult the official FMCSRs and seek legal counsel or certified compliance consultants for specific regulatory interpretation or legal matters.

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Introduction

Now to Use This Manual

This manual is designed to give fleet managers, safety coordinators, and compliance officers a clear, structured, and practical reference for managing FMCSA regulations across large commercial fleets. It's organized into three core sections—Truck Regulations, Driver Regulations, and Drug & Alcohol Testing—each built around real-world responsibilities and daily workflows.

You'll find:

- Plain-language explanations of regulatory requirements
- Checklists, flowcharts, and visual aids for quick reference
- Field-tested best practices to avoid violations and downtime
- **Printable tools** to help with training, audits, and inspections

You don't have to read this manual front to back. Each section stands on its own, so you can jump to the topic you need, whether you're prepping for a DOT audit or onboarding a new driver.

Who This Guide Is For

This manual was built specifically for:

- Fleet managers who oversee commercial vehicle operations
- Safety and compliance officers responsible for FMCSA adherence
- **Dispatchers and supervisors** who influence day-to-day DOT compliance
- Company owners managing DOT numbers, insurance, and fleet liability

It's especially useful for larger fleets where multiple departments touch compliance—and where falling out of line with one FMCSA regulation can impact CSA scores, insurance premiums, or even your operating authority.



Why Compliance Matters

FMCSA compliance isn't just about passing an audit—it's about:

- Keeping your drivers safe
- Protecting your operating authority
- Avoiding fines, violations, and out-of-service orders
- Shielding your company from **legal liability** in the event of a crash

DOT regulations can be dense, inconsistent, and hard to follow—but enforcement is strict, and ignorance is not a defense. This manual bridges the gap between what the regulations say and what you actually need to do to stay compliant and operational every day.

By using this guide, you're not just checking boxes. You're building a stronger, safer, and more audit-ready fleet.

Section 1: Truck Regulations

Keeping Your Equipment Legal, Safe, and On the Road

Running a fleet isn't just about putting drivers behind the wheel and getting freight to its destination. If the trucks aren't in top shape—and compliant with federal regulations—everything grinds to a halt. Or worse, it keeps moving and racks up violations, fines, and audit triggers while doing it.

As a fleet manager, you're responsible for more than just making sure trucks are available—you're responsible for making sure every vehicle is safe, road-legal, and documented properly. This section walks you through the key FMCSA rules that apply to the vehicles themselves—not the drivers (that's coming up in Section 2), and not the drug and alcohol testing program (that's Section 3).

We're focusing on three core regulation areas:

- Part 390 The general foundation: who's covered, what counts as a commercial vehicle, and where your responsibilities begin.
- Part 393 The equipment rules: what every truck must have to be legal and safe.
- Part 396 The maintenance and inspection rules: how to keep your trucks in service and out of the shop (or worse, out of service).

This isn't a legal reference guide. It's a practical manual designed for the real world—where a fleet manager juggles deadlines, break downs, inspection reports, compliance reviews, and driver complaints—all before lunch. Our goal here is to simplify the regs, help you spot compliance risks early, and give you tools to stay organized and ready for anything FMCSA throws at you.

Part 1: Inspections and Maintenance Requirements

"You can't manage what you don't inspect—and if it breaks, it better not be a surprise."

Let's be honest: trucks are money. And when they're parked, broken down, or flagged during a roadside inspection, that money evaporates fast. One of the most important responsibilities you have as a fleet manager is making sure every truck in your operation is inspected and maintained to meet FMCSA standards—not just to pass audits, but to keep your business running safely and efficiently.

This part of the manual covers the **core inspection and maintenance requirements** from **Part 396** of the FMCSRs. We're going to focus on what you're *actually* required to do, what paperwork you need to keep, and how to avoid common mistakes that can get you written up in an audit or hit with a violation on the side of the road.

What FMCSA Expects

Under 49 CFR Part 396, the FMCSA expects every motor carrier to:

- 1. Systematically inspect, repair, and maintain every vehicle under their control.
- 2. Keep **records** showing inspections, maintenance schedules, and repairs.
- 3. Ensure each vehicle **receives an annual inspection** by a qualified inspector.
- 4. Require drivers to conduct daily inspections (DVIRs) and report defects.

Let's break that down in a way that makes sense for a large fleet.

Scheduled Maintenance: It's Not Optional

You must have a **systematic maintenance program**. That doesn't mean fixing things when they break—it means having a **defined**, **documented schedule** based on **mileage**, **time intervals**, **engine hours**, or all three.

Manager Tip: You don't have to use FMCSA's language—just make sure whatever system you use (paper, spreadsheet, or software) shows that every truck is on a planned maintenance schedule and you're following it.

Annual Inspections (396.17)

Every commercial vehicle must have a **full inspection at least once every 12 months**, covering the same items as a Level 1 DOT roadside inspection. It must be documented and signed by a **qualified inspector** (more on that below).

This inspection must cover:

Brakes

- Lighting
- Steering
- Suspension
- Frame
- Tires/wheels/rims
- Fuel system
- Windshield wipers
- Horn
- And more...

Important: If your trucks go through a Level 1 inspection by DOT and pass—it counts as your annual! Just keep a copy on file.

Who Can Perform Annual Inspections?

A "qualified inspector" must:

- Understand and be able to identify defective parts,
- Know FMCSA inspection criteria, and
- Have documented training or experience.

Manager Tip: If you outsource inspections to a dealer or service center, make sure they **sign off** as qualified per 396.19—and get that documentation on file.

Common Audit Failure: No Written Maintenance Schedule

This is one of the top triggers for a conditional rating during a compliance review. FMCSA doesn't care if you use Fleetio, a Google Sheet, or a clipboard in the garage—as long as:

- The schedule exists,
- It's consistently followed, and
- You can show it during an audit.

Maintenance Must Cover:

At a minimum, your maintenance program must address:

- Brake system checks and repairs
- Tire inspection and rotation/replacement
- Lighting and electrical system
- Engine, transmission, cooling systems
- Suspension and steering components
- Safety devices like seatbelts, mirrors, and fire extinguishers

Pro Tip: Include trailer maintenance in the same system. They're often forgotten—until a roadside inspector finds a busted light or missing breakaway cable.

What About Leased Vehicles or Owner-Operators?

If the vehicle is **operating under your DOT number**, it's your responsibility—even if you don't own the truck.

Make sure:

- Owner-operators are following your maintenance schedule.
- You collect their maintenance and inspection records.
- Annual inspections are submitted to you and kept in your files.

® Bottom Line

If it rolls, hauls, or tows under your authority—it must be **maintained**, **inspected**, and **documented**. And when the FMCSA shows up (or pulls you over), **"we didn't know"** doesn't fly.

🚫 Part 2: Out-of-Service Criteria Basics

"You can't haul freight if you're parked on the side of the highway with a sticker on your window."

Nothing stops operations—and tanks your CSA scores—like an **out-of-service (OOS)** violation. Whether it happens during a roadside inspection, a weigh station check, or a surprise enforcement blitz, an OOS order means that truck (or driver) isn't moving until the problem is fixed. Period.

In this section, we'll break down:

- What qualifies as an out-of-service violation
- How inspectors make those decisions
- The most common OOS issues for large fleets
- What you can do to avoid getting shut down in the field

What Does "Out-of-Service" Really Mean?

An OOS order is issued when a vehicle or driver is found to have a defect or violation **so serious** it poses an **immediate safety risk**.

When a truck is placed out of service:

- It cannot move under its own power until repaired
- The violation must be corrected before continuing the trip
- In many cases, a mechanic's certification or **re-inspection** is required

• Penalties escalate if the truck is moved anyway

Manager Tip: If a truck gets slapped with an OOS violation and your driver moves it, you're now looking at serious enforcement action—including possible shutdown orders or fines.

Where Do the Rules Come From?

OOS criteria are set by the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA)—not FMCSA directly—but FMCSA enforces them under Parts 393 and 396.

You can purchase the latest CVSA Out-of-Service Criteria Handbook annually at CVSA.org, but here's the short version...

Common OOS Violations (Vehicle)

Component	Example OOS Violation
Brakes	Cracked brake linings, out-of-adjustment pushrods, leaking air lines
Tires	Exposed cords, flat or underinflated to unsafe levels
Lights	Inoperable brake lights, turn signals, or required lamps
Suspension	Broken leaf springs, shifted axles
Steering	Excessive free play, missing parts, worn components
Coupling Devices	Cracked fifth wheel, missing safety pins, damaged kingpin
Load Securement	Missing or broken tie-downs, unsecured heavy equipment

Fast Fact: Brakes are the #1 cause of OOS violations year after year.

There are **eight levels of roadside inspections**, but **Level I and Level V** are the most thorough and most likely to uncover an OOS condition.

Level	What It Involves
1	Full driver and vehicle inspection
II	Walk-around inspection
Ш	Driver-only inspection
V	Vehicle-only inspection (often at company terminal)
VI	Radioactive material transport (special case)

If a driver gets a **Level I** and something like an air brake adjustment is out of spec, the inspector will issue an OOS order **on the spot**.

★ How to Keep Trucks From Getting Tagged

Here's the cold truth: most OOS violations are 100% preventable.

✓ Prevention Checklist:

- Make sure **DVIRs are taken seriously**—not pencil-whipped
- Have a PM program that catches wear before it becomes failure
- Use internal spot inspections before major enforcement periods (like CVSA Roadcheck Week)
- Train drivers to catch defects during pre-trips
- Track **repeat offenders** (both vehicles and drivers)

Manager Tip: If one truck keeps showing up with brake issues, **stop rotating drivers** through it and dig into why your maintenance program isn't catching it.



Out-of-service violations don't just take a truck off the road—they raise your **CSA scores**, flag you for increased inspections, and can trigger an FMCSA audit. One bad inspection doesn't kill a fleet—but ignoring trends definitely can.



Part 3: Truck Equipment Compliance Checklist

"If it's on the truck, it better work. If it's required, it better be there."

Whether you're running dry vans, reefers, flatbeds, or heavy haul—every commercial truck has to meet minimum equipment standards under 49 CFR Part 393. These are the nuts-and-bolts rules that say what your trucks must have to be considered roadworthy: lights, brakes, mirrors, mudflaps, and so on.

Think of this as your line-item cheat sheet to make sure the trucks in your yard don't end up on the hook at the next weigh station.

Why This Matters

- Part 393 violations make up a huge percentage of roadside citations
- Most violations are visible, obvious, and 100% avoidable
- Compliance failures impact your CSA Vehicle BASIC score
- It's a first impression issue—inspectors start with what they can see

Manager Tip: Make this checklist part of your pre-deployment process after PMs or repairs. Don't assume everything was reconnected or replaced properly.

Truck Equipment Compliance Checklist

A quick-reference breakdown of what FMCSA says your trucks must have—fully operational and in spec.



Safety & Emergency Equipment (393.95)

- Fire extinguisher (rated 5 B:C or greater, fully charged, secured)
- 3 reflective triangles or 6 fusees
- Spare fuses (unless truck uses circuit breakers)

Lighting Devices and Reflectors (393.11)

- Headlamps (low and high beam)
- Tail lamps (2 minimum)
- Stop lamps
- Turn signals (front and rear)
- Clearance and marker lamps (correct color & position)
- Reflectors (required quantity and placement per vehicle size)
- License plate light (white)

Note: Lights must be **the correct color** and **not obstructed** by cargo, dirt, or aftermarket modifications.

Brakes (393.40 - 393.55)

- Service brakes functional on all wheels
- Parking brake capable of holding vehicle
- Brake linings not worn or cracked
- Air pressure buildup within spec
- No audible air leaks
- Warning light/buzzer for low air pressure operational

ABS functioning (if equipped)

Pro Tip: Drivers should be trained to **check brake stroke** and air loss during pre-trips—don't leave it up to the inspector to find it first.

🔘 Mirrors & Visibility (393.80)

- Two outside mirrors with clear rearward view
- Convex mirrors properly mounted (if needed for blind spots)
- Mirrors clean and adjusted for driver height

Tires, Wheels, and Rims (393.75)

- Tread depth 4/32" (steer) / 2/32" (others)
- No exposed belts or cords
- No sidewall bubbles, cuts, or separation
- All lug nuts present and secure
- No cracks or rust trails on wheel hubs or rims

🔩 Steering & Suspension (393.209 / 393.207)

- Steering components tight, no excessive play
- Power steering fluid full
- Springs and shackles intact, not broken
- Shocks and mounts secure, no leaks

∅ Coupling Devices (393.70)

- 5th wheel securely fastened and not cracked
- Locking jaws fully engaged
- Safety pins and release handle in locked position
- Kingpin not worn or damaged
- Safety chains/cables (for trailers as required)

Mudflaps & Splash Guards (State-specific but often cited)

- Installed behind rear wheels
- Proper height and width to cover tire spray

Other Required Items

- Horn functional (393.81)
- Windshield free of major cracks or obstructions (393.60)
- Windshield wipers operate effectively (393.78)
- Seat belts functional and accessible (393.93)
- Speedometer working (393.82)
- Fuel tank cap in place and no leaks (393.67)

📸 Photo Audit Tip

Have drivers or techs snap a photo of each truck's key compliance points during PM or post-repair inspections. Store them digitally. It takes 5 minutes and may save your ass during an audit or crash investigation.

y Wrap-Up

If you were building a truck from scratch just to pass FMCSA inspection, this is your blueprint. Use this checklist before inspections, after maintenance, and during random internal audits. Get your shop team in the habit of thinking in terms of regulatory readiness, not just "does it run?"

Part 4: Daily Inspection Flowchart (DVIR Process)

"If the driver isn't checking the truck, the inspector will."

Let's be clear: **Driver Vehicle Inspection Reports (DVIRs)** aren't just a formality—they're required by law, and they're your first line of defense against breakdowns, violations, and out-of-service orders. When your drivers do them right, you stay ahead of safety issues. When they rush through or skip them, you're blind to what's about to roll into a weigh station—or worse, onto a tow truck.

What FMCSA Requires (Part 396.11 & 396.13):

- Post-trip inspections are mandatory and must be documented.
- **Pre-trip inspections** must include a review of the previous day's DVIR and verification that defects were corrected or noted.
- DVIRs are required for trucks and trailers.
- Drivers must sign off that the vehicle is safe to operate—or flag any safety defects.

Manager Tip: The DVIR isn't just a paperwork exercise—it's a legal document. If it's missing, incomplete, or falsified, you're liable, not just the driver.

Here's a breakdown of the most common items drivers are expected to inspect each day:

DVIR Inspection Items:

- Service brakes
- Parking brake
- Steering
- Lighting devices and reflectors
- Tires and wheels
- Horn
- Windshield wipers
- Mirrors
- Emergency equipment
- Coupling devices
- Trailer lights, tires, brakes, and securement

If any of these systems are defective, **the driver must report it** on the DVIR and you must ensure it's fixed before the vehicle returns to service.

DVIR Process Flowchart

pgsql CopyEdit

```
| END OF SHIFT (Post-Trip) |

| Driver inspects vehicle |
| (truck + trailer) |
```



Recordkeeping Requirements

• DVIRs must be retained for 90 days.

- Defect reports and repair records must be kept with the vehicle's file.
- **Electronic DVIRs (eDVIRs)** are allowed—but make sure your system captures:
 - Date/time
 - o Vehicle ID
 - Driver signature (digital or written)
 - Repair confirmation if defects were noted

Common DVIR Mistakes to Avoid:

Mistake	Why It's a Problem
DVIRs marked "no defects" daily, regardless of vehicle condition	Triggers red flags during audits—clearly pencil-whipped
Driver fails to review previous DVIR before pre-trip	Violates 396.13 and shifts liability
Repairs made but not documented or signed off	You can't prove you corrected a safety defect
DVIRs missing or improperly filed	Audit failure + retention violation

Pro Tip: Cross-train dispatch or safety staff to randomly audit DVIRs weekly—look for patterns of neglect or rushed reports.

Bottom Line

If you get hit with an audit or a crash investigation, one of the first things they'll ask for is your **DVIR history**. Treat it like it matters—because it does.

Part 5: Recordkeeping Requirements and Best **Practices**

"If it's not documented, it didn't happen—and FMCSA will assume the worst."

You can have the cleanest trucks, the best-trained drivers, and a maintenance program that runs like a Swiss watch. But if you don't have the **records** to prove it, none of it matters in an audit or roadside investigation.

This part is your go-to guide for what you need to **document**, how long to **keep it**, and how to **organize it** so you're always ready when FMCSA comes knocking.

Why Recordkeeping Matters

- FMCSA requires it—plain and simple.
- Poor or missing documentation is a top audit trigger.
- In a crash, your files may be subpoenaed—you want them airtight.
- It helps identify patterns before they become problems (repeat repairs, driver behavior, etc.).

Manager Tip: Think of your records as **insurance**. You're not just keeping paper—you're building a legal defense file.

What You Must Keep (By Category)

Vehicle Maintenance Records (Part 396.3 & 396.17)

You must maintain a separate file for each vehicle under your control for 30+ days.

Required Contents:

- Vehicle ID (VIN, make, model, year, unit #)
- Company-specific maintenance schedule
- All inspection, maintenance, and repair records
- Annual inspection reports

• Name of mechanic or shop that performed work

Retention Period:

- 1 year while in service
- 6 months after retirement/sale of vehicle

DVIRs (Parts 396.11 & 396.13)

- Must retain all driver DVIRs for 90 days
- Include any reports with defects noted
- Must include confirmation of repairs when applicable

Pro Tip: Use a highlighter or flag system for any DVIRs marked with "defects." These are the ones auditors will ask for first.

Emergency Equipment Documentation

Not required to be tracked *specifically*—but wise to log:

- Fire extinguisher checks
- Triangle/fusee replacement schedule
- Monthly inspection logs (especially for fleets operating in CA or other states with stricter standards)

a Annual DOT Inspections

• Required once every **12 months** per vehicle (396.17)

- Must be retained on file for 14 months
- Should clearly identify:
 - Inspector's name and credentials
 - Date and scope of inspection
 - o Pass/fail result and repair documentation

Best Practices for Staying Organized

音 File by Unit Number

Create a **Vehicle File Folder** for each unit in your fleet:

```
Folder 1107 - 2022 Freightliner Cascadia

- Maintenance Schedule.pdf

- DVIR Log Sheets (last 90 days)

- Repair Invoices

- DOT Annual Inspections

- Work Orders & Parts Receipts

- PM Checklists
```

Go Digital (but Do It Right)

Digital systems (Fleetio, Whip Around, Samsara, etc.) are 100% acceptable—as long as:

- Records are easily retrievable
- You can produce **PDFs or printed copies** on request
- Files are locked or time-stamped to prevent tampering

Manager Tip: If it takes more than 5 minutes to pull a record during an audit, your system is too slow.

Internal File Audits

- Set a calendar reminder to audit 5% of your vehicle files every month
- Check for:
 - Missing documents
 - Gaps in PM scheduling
 - Unresolved DVIR defects
 - Annual inspection past due

Use a simple checklist like this:

Monthly Vehicle File Audit Form:

Item	Compliant?	Note
Maintenance schedule present and current	V / X	
DVIRs on file (90 days)	V / X	
Repairs documented	V / X	
Annual inspection within 12 months	V / X	
Work orders match repair logs	V / X	

® Bottom Line

Documentation doesn't have to be complicated—but it has to be **complete**, **current**, **and accessible**. If an investigator asks for a file and your answer starts with "Well, we think it's somewhere..."—you've already lost.

Part 6: Understanding Part 390 – Applicability, Definitions, Exemptions

"You can't follow the rules if you don't know they apply to you."

Part 390 is the **starting line** of the FMCSRs. It sets the stage for everything else—who the rules apply to, what counts as a commercial motor vehicle, and when you're allowed to be exempt. A lot of fleet managers skim over this part, but it's arguably one of the most important.

Why? Because if you don't understand **what falls under FMCSA authority**, you can easily find yourself operating outside the lines without even realizing it.

Let's break this down in plain English.

Who the Rules Apply To

Under **390.3**, the regulations apply to **any motor carrier and driver** who operates a **Commercial Motor Vehicle (CMV)** in **interstate commerce**, unless specifically exempt.

So, what's a CMV?

According to **390.5**, a CMV is any self-propelled or towed vehicle used on a highway in interstate commerce to transport passengers or property, **if it meets any of these**:

- Has a GVWR, GCWR, GVW, or GCW of 10,001 lbs. or more, or
- Is designed or used to transport 9 or more passengers (including the driver) for compensation, or 16 or more passengers not for compensation, or
- Is used to transport hazardous materials in a quantity requiring placards

Manager Tip: GVWR isn't just about the weight on the scale—it's the rating on the door sticker. If your trucks or trailers are over 10,001 lbs. GVWR, you're in FMCSA territory.

🔁 Interstate vs. Intrastate

Interstate commerce doesn't just mean crossing state lines.

If your freight:

 Originates in one state and is destined for another, even if your truck doesn't cross the line, or Is part of a supply chain involving multiple states

...you're still considered interstate.

Example: A carrier in North Carolina delivering a load from a port that arrived from California? Interstate—even if it stavs in-state.

Registration Requirements Under Part 390

- You must register for a USDOT number if you operate CMVs in interstate commerce.
- You must display your USDOT number on both sides of every power unit (visible, legible, contrasting color).
- Carriers must also file a MCS-150 update at least every 24 months—or face deactivation of their DOT number.

Common Misunderstanding: The "Short-Haul Exemption"

Part 390 lays the groundwork for **exemptions**, but they're often misunderstood.

Here's one you hear a lot:

"We're under 100 air miles, so none of the rules apply to us."

That's wrong.

The 100 air-mile exemption applies only to Hours of Service (Part 395), not to:

- Vehicle inspections (Part 396)
- Equipment requirements (Part 393)
- Driver qualifications (Part 391)
- Drug & alcohol testing (Part 382)

So yes—your driver might be exempt from keeping a logbook, but you're still subject to most FMCSRs.

Other Notable Exemptions in 390

Exemption	Applies To	Key Notes
Private non-business transportation	Personal CMV use	No compensation or business-related purpose
Occasional transportation of personal property	Private use of CMVs	Excludes rentals used for business
Covered farm vehicles (CFVs)	Ag haulers	Limited by distance, weight, and commodity
School bus and transit operations	Local/state passenger carriers	Not subject to FMCSA regs unless in interstate commerce

Manager Tip: Exemptions don't apply automatically. If you're going to operate under one, **document your justification** in case of an audit.

Why Understanding Part 390 Matters

If you:

- Use mixed-weight vehicles
- Lease on owner-operators
- Operate in-state only
- Carry your own equipment or products

...you *might* think you're not subject to FMCSA rules. But **Part 390 is where that assumption either holds up—or gets you fined**.

Bottom Line

Everything starts with **Part 390**. It defines the rules of the road for carriers, drivers, and vehicles. Misunderstanding what applies to you is one of the easiest ways to slip into noncompliance without even knowing it.

When in doubt? Assume the regs apply—and ask for an exemption later, not forgiveness.



Section 2: Driver Regulations

"Because the truck doesn't move without the right person behind the wheel."

You can have the best equipment, the latest tracking tech, and the tightest maintenance program in the industry—but if your drivers aren't properly qualified, rested, and compliant, your fleet is one roadside inspection away from a serious problem.

Section 2 is all about the people in the driver's seat—what they need to have, how they need to operate, and what can get them (and your company) in hot water fast.

We're focusing on the three FMCSR parts that govern drivers:

- Part 391 Hiring and qualification standards: Who's legally allowed to drive and what paperwork proves it.
- Part 392 Conduct and behavior: How drivers are expected to operate behind the wheel.
- Part 395 Hours of Service: When your drivers are allowed to drive, when they need to rest, and how it all gets logged.

This isn't just about keeping your drivers legal—it's about keeping your operation protected. A missed medical renewal, a false logbook, or an unqualified hire can lead to serious violations, audit findings, and liability in the event of a crash.

In this section, we'll walk through:

- Who you can hire (and how to prove they're qualified)
- What documentation you need to keep updated
- How to manage HOS rules and avoid ELD headaches
- The behaviors that get drivers disgualified—and how to spot red flags early

What to expect during roadside inspections (and how to prepare drivers to pass them)

🧖 Part 1: Hiring and Qualification Standards

"If they're not qualified, they're not your driver—no matter how good they are with a stick shift."

Hiring a driver isn't as simple as checking for a CDL and throwing them the keys. The FMCSA sets strict rules under Part 391 about who you can hire, what paperwork must be collected, and how long you need to keep it. And if you miss a step, it can cost you—big time—in audits, lawsuits, or accidents.

This section walks you through what a compliant driver qualification process looks like, and how to build and maintain a Driver Qualification File (DQF) that can stand up to scrutiny.

Who's Qualified to Drive a CMV? (Per 391.11)

A driver must meet *all* of the following to be considered qualified:

- Be at least 21 years old
- Be able to read and speak English well enough to converse, understand traffic signs, and complete reports
- Hold a valid CDL with the correct class and endorsements for the vehicle being driven
- Have a **current medical examiner's certificate** (more on this in the next section)
- Have no disqualifying criminal or driving history (DUIs, felony use of a CMV, etc.)
- Pass a road test, or provide acceptable equivalent (e.g. previous employer certificate)
- Have adequate experience or training to operate the type of vehicle assigned

The Driver Qualification File (DQF)

This is the **legal record** that proves your driver was qualified at the time of hire and continues to meet requirements during employment.

Manager Tip: FMCSA doesn't care if your driver's "a good guy"—they care about the paper trail. If it's not in the file, it didn't happen.

DQF Required Documents Checklist

Document	When Required	Retention Period
✓ Driver Application	At hiring	Entire employment + 3 years after termination
✓ MVR (from each state in past 3 years)	At hiring	3 years
✓ Annual MVR Review	Yearly	3 years
✓ Medical Certificate	Current and valid	Keep while valid + 3 years
✓ Medical Examiner's National Registry Verification	At hiring	3 years
✓ Road Test or Equivalent	At hiring	Entire employment
✓ Previous Employer Safety History Inquiry	At hiring	Document attempt + results (retain 3 years)
✓ Drug & Alcohol Pre-employment Test Result	At hiring	5 years (we'll revisit in Section 3)

Don't Forget the 391.23 Inquiry

Within 30 days of hire, you must:

- Contact all DOT-regulated employers from the past 3 years
- Request drug/alcohol violation history
- Document your attempts, even if they don't respond

Pro Tip: Use a standard form and keep the fax/email confirmation. FMCSA wants proof you tried.

Common Pitfalls in the Hiring Process

Mistake Why It's a Problem

Hiring before MVR or drug screen clears Immediate disqualification risk

Using an outdated application form Missing required questions/details

Incomplete DQF at time of audit Automatic "noncompliance" finding

No proof of past employer contact Violates 391.23 and looks sloppy

No road test or valid equivalent

Liability exposure in crash investigations

Bottom Line

A compliant DQF isn't just about checking boxes—it's about proving that you hired responsibly. If you can't prove it on paper, **you're assuming all the risk**.

This is the first line of defense in protecting your company from violations, lawsuits, and disqualified drivers slipping through the cracks.

Part 2: Medical Certifications and Renewals

"If your driver can't pass a DOT physical, they can't touch the keys. No exceptions."

It doesn't matter how skilled, experienced, or loyal a driver is—if they don't have a valid **DOT medical certificate**, they're not qualified to drive. Period.

This isn't just a technicality—it's federal law under **Part 391.41–391.49**, and it's a hot button for auditors. The FMCSA wants to know:

"Can you prove that every driver in your fleet is medically qualified to operate a commercial motor vehicle?"

This section covers:

- What the medical certification is
- How to manage renewals
- What to watch for with medical conditions
- How the National Registry works
- And what happens when a driver is disqualified

What Is a DOT Medical Certificate?

The **Medical Examiner's Certificate** (commonly called a DOT card) confirms that a driver meets the physical and mental standards to safely operate a CMV.

It's issued by a Certified Medical Examiner (CME) listed on the FMCSA's National Registry.

How Long Is It Good For?

- Most drivers receive a certificate valid for up to 2 years
- Some drivers may get a **shorter-term card** (e.g., 3 months, 6 months, 1 year) due to health concerns like:
 - High blood pressure
 - Diabetes
 - Sleep apnea
 - Vision or hearing limitations

Manager Tip: If you get a driver with a 3- or 6-month medical card, set a **calendar alert immediately**. These are the ones most likely to expire unnoticed.

- You must retain a copy of each driver's current medical card in their DQF
- You must verify the medical examiner is listed in the National Registry
- You must track expiration dates and ensure renewals are completed before the current card expires
- If a driver fails a DOT physical, they must be immediately disqualified from driving

Red Flags to Watch For

Issue	Why It's a Problem
Medical card expired by even 1 day	Driver is no longer qualified—must be pulled off the road
Missing examiner name or registry number	Invalid certificate—DQF violation
No explanation for short-term certification	Could indicate unmanaged condition—follow up
Using a non-certified medical examiner	Entire medical card is invalid under FMCSA rules

Medical Conditions That Require Monitoring

Drivers with the following **may need periodic re-certification**, waivers, or special documentation:

- **Diabetes** (especially insulin-dependent)
- Seizure disorders
- Heart disease
- Sleep apnea
- Vision impairment in one eye
- Hearing loss requiring hearing aids

Amputations or use of prosthetics

These drivers may still be eligible to drive—but you'll need to ensure they meet the requirements for a **medical variance** or **skill performance evaluation (SPE)**.

National Registry of Certified Medical Examiners

- Available at: https://nrcme.fmcsa.dot.gov
- Before accepting any new medical certificate, verify that:
 - The examiner is listed and active
 - Their National Registry Number appears on the certificate
 - All fields are properly filled in and signed

File Retention Requirements

- Medical certificates must be retained for as long as they're valid
- Any expired, superseded, or withdrawn certificates must be kept for 3 years

What If a Driver Fails or Lets Their Card Expire?

- They must be **immediately removed** from driving duties
- They may not return to safety-sensitive functions until:
 - They pass a new DOT physical
 - You receive a valid new certificate
- Keep documentation of:

- The disqualification notice
- The date they were pulled from service
- The date they were requalified (if applicable)

Pro Tip: Set reminders **90**, **60**, **and 30 days** before expiration. You'll thank yourself later.

® Bottom Line

Managing medical cards isn't just paperwork—it's the **foundation of driver qualification**. An expired DOT card is one of the fastest ways to fail an audit and land in hot water with FMCSA.

Track it. Check it. File it. Repeat.

(i) Part 3: Hours of Service Rules (HOS)

"No load is worth a violation—or a lawsuit."

If there's one section of the FMCSRs that keeps safety managers up at night, it's this one. **Part 395** sets the limits for how long a driver can be on the road, when they need breaks, and how long they must rest between shifts. Mess it up, and you're looking at everything from **CSA point hits** to **driver disqualification**, or worse—**serious liability in the event of a crash**.

This part of the guide walks through the **key HOS limits**, what counts as **on-duty time**, and how to **train your team** to stay in compliance.

III Who Must Comply With HOS Rules?

If your driver:

- Operates a CMV over 10,001 lbs., and
- Drives in interstate commerce, and
- Is not otherwise exempt (like under short-haul rules)...

...then Part 395 applies.

Manager Tip: Even yard jockeys and short-haul drivers must be monitored—many HOS exemptions are misunderstood or misapplied.

Basic HOS Limits (Property-Carrying Drivers)

Rule	Limit
11-Hour Rule	May drive up to 11 hours after 10 consecutive hours off-duty
14-Hour Rule	May not drive after 14 consecutive hours since coming on duty , even if not driving the whole time
30-Minute Break Rule	Must take a 30-minute break after 8 hours of driving time
60/70-Hour Rule	May not drive after 60 hours in 7 days (or 70 hours in 8 days), depending on carrier schedule
34-Hour Restart	May reset the 60/70-hour clock after 34 consecutive hours off-duty

How Time Breaks Down

Time Category	What It Includes
On-Duty Time	Driving, loading/unloading, fueling, inspections, paperwork, waiting (if not in sleeper)
Off-Duty Time	Personal time not performing work or subject to dispatch
Sleeper Berth	Off-duty time spent resting in the sleeper (may count toward 10-hour break)
Pro Tip: "Just waiting to be loaded" still counts as on-duty time unless the driver is free to leave the premises.	

Key Exemptions You Should Understand

100 Air-Mile Exception (Short-Haul)

Available to CDL drivers who:

- Start and return to the same location
- Work no more than 12 hours
- Stay within **100 air miles** (about 115 road miles)
- Have at least 10 hours off between shifts
- Still required to record time, but a logbook/ELD is not requiredIf any one element is exceeded, the driver must use a logbook that day

16-Hour Exception (Once per 7 days)

CDL drivers may extend their **14-hour window to 16 hours**, *once per 7-day period*, if:

- Returning to the same terminal
- Not using it consecutively
- No driving after the 16th hour

* Adverse Driving Conditions Rule

Allows drivers to extend their driving window by 2 hours (e.g., from 11 to 13 driving hours) if:

- Unexpected conditions arise (e.g., snow, accident, detour)
- They **could not have known** about it when dispatch began

Manager Tip: This must be documented and not abused—FMCSA reviews these claims closely.

What Happens When You Violate HOS?

- Driver may be placed out of service
- CSA points applied to your Hours-of-Service BASIC
- Repeated violations increase risk of audit
- Creates massive liability if tied to a crash or fatality

Fleet Manager Best Practices

Task

Monitor logs daily or weekly

Catch errors or tampering early

Train dispatchers on HOS rules

Prevents illegal load scheduling

Keep policies for breaks and resets

Helps drivers plan legally

Know your ELD system inside and out

Don't rely on it blindly—audit it

Apply exemptions only when justified

Misuse = violations and lawsuits

® Bottom Line

HOS rules aren't just about staying compliant—they're about protecting your drivers, your equipment, and your company's reputation.

One bad decision by a tired driver can cost you **everything**. So give them the time they need, and make sure your processes back it up.

📊 Part 4: Driver Logs and ELD Use – Chart Comparison

"If it's not logged right, it's not legal—no matter what the driver actually did."

You've got your drivers trained on HOS, your dispatchers understand the 14-hour rule, and everyone's on the same page about rest breaks. But all of it means nothing if the **logs don't match the reality**.

Whether you're using Electronic Logging Devices (ELDs) or operating under a short-haul exemption, how you track hours is just as important as the hours themselves. FMCSA has made it clear: they expect accurate, tamper-proof, retrievable records of duty status (RODS). This part breaks down log types, ELD rules, exceptions, and how to quickly compare options.

What Are RODS?

RODS stands for **Records of Duty Status**. These are logs that document what a driver was doing throughout the day—driving, resting, fueling, waiting at a dock, etc.

There are three common formats for RODS:

- 1. Manual paper logs
- 2. ELD (Electronic Logging Devices)
- 3. **Time records** (for short-haul exemptions)

Each has specific use cases and requirements.

□ Driver Log Comparison Chart

Method	When It's Allowed	What's Required	Key Limitations
ELD	Required for most property-carrying drivers operating CMVs in interstate commerce who are not exempt	Registered, FMCSA-compliant ELD; 8-day data retention; driver login/logout	Must follow strict edit rules; requires training
Paper Logs	Only when: 1) ELD malfunctions, or 2) driver uses paper logs 8 days or fewer in any 30-day period	FMCSA-compliant grid log with all required fields	Cannot be used as primary logging system for most fleets
Time Records (100/150 air-mile exemption)	For eligible short-haul drivers who meet all exemption criteria	Accurate start/end times, total on-duty hours, 6-month retention	If even one element is exceeded, full log required that day

Manager Tip: If your driver goes beyond 100 air miles just once, they need a logbook for that day—no exceptions.

What Makes an ELD FMCSA-Compliant?

A compliant ELD must:

- Be registered with the FMCSA
- Automatically record:
 - Drive time
 - o Engine hours
 - Location (every 60 minutes during driving)
 - Odometer reading
- Prevent tampering or log falsification
- Require driver certification of logs daily
- Provide logs for law enforcement via telematics or local transfer

Check your ELD's status at: https://eld.fmcsa.dot.gov/List

⚠ Top ELD Violations

Violation	Code	Why It Happens
Failing to login/logout	395.22(h)	Driver forgets to change status manually
Incomplete logs or edits without annotation	395.30	Driver edits logs but doesn't explain why
No ELD instruction sheet or user manual in vehicle	395.22(g)	Required by FMCSA and often overlooked

Pro Tip: Keep a laminated ELD troubleshooting sheet in each truck. DOT inspectors will ask for it.

What's Required on a Paper Log?

If you're using paper logs (temporarily or as backup), each log must include:

- Driver's full name
- Date and total miles driven
- Truck/tractor and trailer number
- Carrier name and DOT number
- 24-hour grid showing duty status (off-duty, sleeper, driving, on-duty)
- Notes/annotations for duty changes
- Signature certifying accuracy

Keep all logs on file for 6 months. Paper logs can be scanned/stored digitally as long as they're retrievable.

🔁 What to Review as a Fleet Manager

- Check for missing or duplicate logs
- Look for **HOS violations within logs** (e.g., driving past 14 hours)
- Make sure drivers are logging fuel stops, inspections, and breaks
- Audit logs weekly—automate where possible, but verify manually

☑ Best Practices for ELD & Log Compliance

Task	Frequency
Train new hires on your ELD system	At hire + refresher annually
Review driver logs for accuracy	Weekly (at minimum)
Maintain malfunction log and repair logs	Ongoing
Keep ELD instructions + malfunction guide in truck	Always
Audit log edits and annotations	Monthly, especially if CSA HOS score is climbing

® Bottom Line

Logs aren't just records—they're evidence. Whether you're showing compliance to an inspector or defending your company in court, **you'll need them clean, complete, and available on demand**.

Train your team to treat logs like legal documents—because that's exactly what they are.

National Part 5: Disqualification Triggers

"You don't get to choose who's qualified. FMCSA does."

You may trust your driver. You may like your driver. But none of that matters if they hit one of FMCSA's automatic disqualification triggers. When that happens, they're legally unfit to drive a commercial motor vehicle, and if they get behind the wheel anyway—you're liable.

In this section, we'll break down:

- What events or violations cause automatic disqualification
- How long disqualification periods last
- What your responsibilities are as a carrier
- How to catch red flags before they become violations

FMCSA Disqualification Rules (Part 391.15 & 383.51)

A driver is **disqualified** from operating a CMV if they:

- Are convicted of certain offenses
- Lose their CDL or driving privileges
- Fail or refuse a drug or alcohol test
- Are medically disqualified
- Commit too many serious traffic violations in a short time

Disqualification periods range from **60 days to lifetime**, depending on the offense.

Major Disqualifying Offenses

Offense	Disqualification Period
DUI (alcohol or drugs) in any vehicle	1 year (3 years if hazmat)
Leaving the scene of an accident	1 year
Using a CMV in a felony	1 year (lifetime for some felonies)
Driving a CMV with a revoked CDL	1 year
Using a CMV in drug trafficking or human trafficking	Lifetime disqualification
Second offense of any above	Lifetime disqualification (some reinstatement possible after 10 years)

Manager Tip: Even DUI convictions in a personal vehicle can disqualify a CDL holder from driving a CMV.



⚠ Serious Traffic Violations (383.51 Table 2)

If a driver commits **two or more serious traffic violations** within **3 years**, they can be disqualified for **60–120 days**, even if the violations happen in a **non-CMV**.

Serious Violations Include:

- Speeding 15+ mph over limit
- Reckless driving
- Improper lane changes
- Following too closely
- Driving without a CDL or proper endorsement
- Cell phone use/texting while driving a CMV

Pro Tip: Track your drivers' MVRs **annually**, but consider spot-checking **every 6 months**—especially if your insurance provider requires it.

Drug & Alcohol Violations (Part 382)

Covered more in Section 3, but briefly:

- Refusing a drug/alcohol test = automatic disqualification
- Positive test = immediate removal from duty + return-to-duty process
- Must complete **Substance Abuse Professional (SAP)** process before reinstatement

What You Must Do as the Carrier

If a driver is disqualified:

- 1. **Immediately remove** them from any safety-sensitive functions (driving, dispatching, loading, etc.)
- 2. **Document the reason** and the date of disqualification

- 3. Do **not allow them to drive** until the disqualification period ends and all reinstatement steps are complete
- 4. Retain **proof of resolution**, including updated MVR, SAP documentation (if applicable), and any state-level reinstatement confirmation

Manager Tip: Letting a disqualified driver behind the wheel is a **federal violation**, **insurance disqualifier**, and **massive liability** in the event of an incident.

Bottom Line

You don't just need to know if your drivers are safe—you need to know if they're **legally qualified**. And when they aren't, it's on **you** to catch it and act.

Disqualified = sidelined. No exceptions.

Part 6: Driver Conduct and Operation Rules

"They wear your logo. What they do out there reflects on you."

You've qualified your drivers. You've trained them. They've passed their physicals. But what happens **on the road**—the moment-to-moment decisions they make—still falls under your responsibility as a carrier.

Part 392 of the FMCSRs sets clear expectations for how commercial drivers must conduct themselves behind the wheel. It covers the things drivers sometimes forget (or ignore), but that **inspectors and cameras never do**—like using a phone, driving tired, or improperly securing cargo.

This part of the manual lays out the rules every driver must follow—and the **policies you need in place** to enforce them.

What Part 392 Covers

- Driving while impaired (alcohol, drugs, illness, fatigue)
- Operating a CMV in an unsafe condition

- Texting or using a handheld phone while driving
- Speeding and reckless operation
- Unauthorized passengers
- Cargo securement and route compliance
- Obeying traffic control devices and emergency procedures

X No Drugs, Alcohol, or Impairment

- No driver may report for duty under the influence of alcohol or any drug.
- No consumption of alcohol within 4 hours of reporting for duty.
- No possession of alcohol or drugs in the vehicle, unless part of a manifest (hazmat).

Manager Tip: This applies even if the driver isn't drinking "on the job." That beer at lunch? Still disqualifying.

♣ No Driving While Fatigued

You are **required to prevent** drivers from operating a CMV if:

- They appear too tired, ill, or impaired to drive safely
- They exceed HOS limits
- They **self-report** fatigue or illness

Best Practice: Empower drivers to **call off a load** if they're fatigued—without penalty.

No Texting or Handheld Phone Use While Driving

FMCSA rules strictly prohibit:

- Texting while driving a CMV
- Holding a phone to talk, dial, or read
- Reaching for a device in a way that causes them to leave a seated, belted position

This includes company-issued devices (ELDs, tablets, routing apps) unless mounted and hands-free.

Violation = \$2,750 fine for the driver, \$11,000 for the carrier.

No Unauthorized Passengers

Drivers may **not transport anyone** in the vehicle unless:

- Authorized in writing by the carrier
- Properly documented for DOT review

No exceptions for friends, spouses, pets (unless part of a documented policy).

∅ Proper Cargo Securement

- All loads must be properly secured according to Part 393 Subpart I
- Drivers are responsible for ensuring cargo hasn't shifted before, during, and after transport
- Securement devices (straps, chains, binders) must be in good condition and properly rated

Flatbeds and open cargo trailers are especially high-risk for securement violations—train accordingly.

Compliance with Traffic Laws & Traffic Control Devices

Drivers must obey:

- Speed limits
- Traffic lights and signs
- Railroad crossing rules (special attention required for buses, hazmat, and CMVs without clear passage)

Manager Tip: A pattern of moving violations reflects on your company's safety rating, not just the driver's record.

Emergency Protocols

Drivers must:

- Know how to use **emergency equipment** (triangles, fire extinguishers)
- Pull over safely when mechanical issues arise
- Report breakdowns or violations to the carrier immediately

What You Should Have in Place

Fleet Manager Conduct Checklist

V	Policy/Action
	Written policy on drug/alcohol use and impairment
	Zero-tolerance policy on phone/texting while driving
	Passenger policy on file and signed by all drivers
	Documented cargo securement training
П	Ongoing MVR monitoring and behavior reviews

Reporting process for driver misconduct or unsafe conditions
Driver coaching or progressive discipline structure
Pro Tip: Don't just write the rules—reinforce them monthly in safety meetings.

Bottom Line

Part 392 may seem like a list of "obvious" rules—but **these are the violations that happen every day**, often when a driver gets too comfortable, overworked, or under pressure.

Make sure your expectations are clear, your policies are in writing, and your drivers know that compliance isn't optional—it's part of the job.

Part 7: Roadside Inspections – What Drivers Should Expect

"The inspection starts the moment the trooper steps out of the car."

No matter how well you run your fleet, eventually your driver is going to get **pulled over or rolled through a weigh station**. That's not the problem—the **problem** is what happens next.

A routine roadside inspection can take **15 minutes or 2 hours**, and the outcome depends on how prepared your **driver** and **vehicle** are when the lights flash.

Part 7 is all about making sure your drivers:

- Know what to expect
- Have the required documents ready
- Understand how to handle themselves professionally
- Can help prevent small issues from becoming big violations

Types of FMCSA Roadside Inspections

Level	What It Includes
Level I	Full inspection of driver and vehicle (most thorough)
Level II	Walk-around inspection (less detailed, no undercarriage)
Level III	Driver-only inspection (documents, logs, license, etc.)
Level IV	Special inspection (one-time, focused issue)
Level V	Vehicle-only inspection (often at carrier terminal)
Level VI	Enhanced hazmat inspection (for radioactive materials)

Most common: Level I, II, and III. These are the ones your drivers must be ready for every day.

Driver Documents Required During an Inspection

Your driver must have these ready and accessible:

- CDL (valid and current)
- Medical Examiner's Certificate (DOT card)
- Driver's daily **logs or ELD** (with instruction sheet)
- Shipping papers / bill of lading
- Proof of insurance and registration
- HAZMAT documentation (if applicable)
- Previous 7 days of logs (if using ELD with malfunction)

Pro Tip: Keep a document folder or binder in the truck. Sloppy paperwork raises red flags immediately.

What Inspectors Will Check (Driver-Specific)

- Driver license and medical card status
- Logs: completeness, accuracy, proper use of exemptions
- Seat belt use
- Driver behavior (attitude, alertness)
- Drug/alcohol signs (smell, speech, demeanor)
- Unauthorized passengers
- Signs of fatigue or illness

📞 What Inspectors Will Check (Vehicle-Specific)

- Brake condition and air pressure
- Tire tread depth and condition
- Lights, reflectors, and signals
- Emergency equipment (extinguisher, triangles)
- Load securement and trailer connections
- Fluid leaks and mechanical issues
- ELD mounting, wiring, and usage

How Drivers Should Handle Inspections

Do Don't

✓ Be polite and professional

X Argue or get defensive

✓ Answer only what's asked
 ✓ Have documents ready
 ✓ Follow instructions
 ✓ Attempt to hide or edit logs on the spot
 ✓ Notify dispatch/safety after inspection
 ✓ Ignore post-inspection paperwork

Manager Tip: One disrespectful or panicked driver can set the tone for the whole inspection. Train them to keep calm and focused.

Post-Inspection: What Happens Next

Drivers should provide you with:

- The inspection report (copy given by the officer)
- Any violation notes or citations
- Out-of-service orders (if applicable)

As the fleet manager, you must:

- Review the report the same day
- Correct any violations and document repairs
- Return the signed inspection report to the state agency within 15 days
- Retain the report and proof of corrections for 12 months

Failure to respond = fine + violation added to CSA scores

Training Checklist for Drivers

✓ Task

Know what documents are required and where to find them
Understand how to operate ELD and provide logs
Perform complete pre-trip and post-trip inspections daily
Know how to explain short-haul or HOS exemptions
Report all inspections (even clean ones) to dispatch immediately
Maintain clean, professional demeanor during all encounters

® Bottom Line

Roadside inspections aren't just about **rules**—they're about **presentation**, **preparation**, **and paperwork**. Help your drivers understand that every time they get inspected, **they're representing your company's safety rating**—and that rating follows you.

Clean inspections = less scrutiny, better insurance, and fewer headaches. Sloppy ones? You already know.

Section 3: Drug & Alcohol Testing

"You don't get a second chance to get this part wrong."

If there's one area of fleet management where **zero tolerance** truly means zero tolerance, it's here. **Part 382** of the FMCSRs outlines strict requirements for **drug and alcohol testing** for all CDL drivers operating in safety-sensitive roles—and if you don't follow these rules exactly, it's not just a fine waiting for you... it's a lawsuit, an audit, or worse.

This isn't a paperwork section. It's about **liability**, **public safety**, **and federal enforcement**. The DOT has made it clear: if a driver is under the influence—of anything—while operating a commercial vehicle, **you are responsible** if your testing program isn't airtight.

In this section, we'll break down everything a fleet manager needs to know about:

• Who's required to be in your testing pool (and when)

- What kinds of tests are required (and why)
- How to manage lab coordination and documentation
- What happens when a driver fails a test or refuses to take one
- What your role is as a supervisor—and how you're expected to handle suspicion
- How to ensure your program is defensible and fully compliant

As with previous sections, we'll skip the fluff and give you:

- Step-by-step guidance
- Practical checklists
- Visual breakdowns where needed
- Policy pointers to protect your company and your drivers

Let's start with the basics: who must be tested and when.



Part 1: Who Must Be Tested and When

"If they're in the seat, they're in the pool."

Drug and alcohol testing under FMCSA regulations isn't just for drivers—it's for anyone in a safety-sensitive role operating a CDL-required commercial motor vehicle. This section explains who must be tested, when the tests happen, and what you're legally obligated to do to stay compliant.



Who Must Be Tested Under Part 382?

If an employee:

• Holds a commercial driver's license (CDL) or commercial learner's permit (CLP), and

- Operates a commercial motor vehicle (CMV) that:
 - Has a GVWR/GCWR of 26,001+ lbs., or
 - o Is designed to transport 16+ passengers (including driver), or
 - Is used to transport hazardous materials requiring placards...
- Then that employee is subject to FMCSA drug and alcohol testing regulations.

Manager Tip: This applies to full-time, part-time, seasonal, casual, and temporary drivers—even owner-operators operating under your DOT number.

When Must You Test?

Testing isn't optional—it must happen **at specific points** in the employment lifecycle and under specific conditions.

*Required Testing Events:

Test Type	When It's Required
Pre-Employment	Before performing any safety-sensitive function
Random	Unannounced, throughout the year
Post-Accident	After qualifying crashes (based on DOT criteria)
Reasonable Suspicion	When a supervisor observes signs of impairment
Return-to-Duty	After a violation and before returning to safety-sensitive work
Follow-Up	After return-to-duty, per SAP's specific plan

No Exceptions for Owner-Operators

If you're using owner-operators under your authority:

- They **must be enrolled** in a compliant testing program
- They cannot "self-monitor"—they must use a third-party consortium or TPA

Their pre-employment test must be completed and passed before driving

Pro Tip: Owner-operators often slip through the cracks. FMCSA considers **you** responsible for verifying compliance if they operate under your DOT number.

Testing Pool Rules (Random Testing)

- Drivers must be **enrolled in the random pool** the day they start driving
- Random testing must be:
 - Unannounced
 - Truly random in selection method
 - Spread reasonably throughout the calendar year
- Minimum annual test rates (as of now):
 - Drug Testing: 50% of total driver pool
 - Alcohol Testing: 10% of total driver pool

These rates can change based on industry-wide positivity rates—**check annually** at <u>FMCSA.dot.gov</u>

Bottom Line

If a driver is **required to hold a CDL** to do their job, then they must be tested—not just once, but at **several critical points** throughout their time with you. And if you miss even one of those points, you're opening the door to fines, shutdowns, and lawsuits.

The moment they're eligible to drive... they need to be in your program.

"Every test has a purpose. Every one is mandatory."

FMCSA doesn't leave much wiggle room when it comes to when drug and alcohol tests must be administered. If you're managing CDL drivers in safety-sensitive positions, you're responsible for ensuring every required test happens—on time, under the right circumstances, and with the correct documentation.

Let's break down each test type in detail.



1. Pre-Employment Testing

Required for:

• Any new driver before performing any safety-sensitive function (driving, loading, vehicle inspections, etc.)

Tested for:

Drugs only (alcohol testing is not required at this stage under FMCSA)

Key Points:

- Must be completed before first dispatch
- Must be a negative result
- No exemptions for temporary, part-time, or seasonal drivers
- Must verify driver was not previously employed within last 30 days under a compliant random program—if so, documentation may satisfy requirement

Manager Tip: Keep a printed copy of negative pre-employment test results in the DQF.



2. Random Testing

Required for:

All CDL drivers performing safety-sensitive functions

Tested for:

• Drugs and alcohol

Frequency:

• **Drug testing**: 50% of total driver pool annually

• Alcohol testing: 10% annually

 Selection must be scientifically random, unannounced, and spread throughout the year

Driver Notification:

- Must be notified immediately before testing
- Must proceed directly to the test site without delay

Violation Tip: A driver who delays or refuses a random test is treated the same as a positive test under FMCSA rules.



3. Post-Accident Testing

Required when an accident meets certain criteria:

If Accident Results In... Then Test Is Required If...

Fatality Always test

Injury with treatment away from scene Test if driver receives a

citation

Disabling vehicle damage requiring Test if driver receives a

tow citation

Timing Requirements:

- Alcohol test: within 2 hours (up to 8 max)
- Drug test: within 32 hours

Document all attempts, even if testing couldn't be completed due to circumstances.

Manager Tip: If testing can't be completed within timeframes, you **must document** why in writing and keep it in your DOT accident file.

•• 4. Reasonable Suspicion Testing

Required for:

• Any driver suspected of being under the influence while on duty

Triggers:

- Observable behavior: slurred speech, odor, confusion, erratic movement, bloodshot eyes, delayed reaction
- Must be observed by a trained supervisor

Requirements:

- Supervisor must complete reasonable suspicion training
- Observations must be specific and contemporaneous
- Test must be conducted immediately

Caution: You can't base this on hearsay or a hunch. Documentation is everything here.

5. Return-to-Duty Testing

Required for:

• Any driver who tested positive, refused a test, or otherwise violated drug/alcohol policy

Before resuming any safety-sensitive function, the driver must:

- 1. Be evaluated by a **Substance Abuse Professional (SAP)**
- 2. Complete the SAP's treatment/education plan
- 3. Provide a **negative result** from a return-to-duty test (observed collection)

77 6. Follow-Up Testing

Required for:

Any driver who has completed return-to-duty process

Conducted by:

• Employer, under direction of SAP

Details:

- Minimum of 6 tests in the first 12 months
- May continue for up to **60 months** (5 years)
- All tests are directly observed
- Schedule is not announced to the driver in advance

® Bottom Line

Each test has a specific **legal trigger**, and it's not optional. If you skip even one, you're exposing your company to:

- FMCSA fines
- CSA score hits
- DOT audits
- Lawsuits (especially post-crash)
- Carrier shutdown (in extreme cases)

Make sure your policies, personnel, and third-party providers understand the exact requirements and follow them to the letter.

Part 3: Chain of Custody Process

"If the sample isn't secure, the result doesn't matter."

It doesn't matter how strict your policy is or how fast you test—if the **sample handling process** isn't clean, clear, and documented, your entire test result can be challenged, dismissed, or thrown out in court.

That's why FMCSA requires every DOT drug and alcohol test to follow a precise, auditable Chain of Custody process. It's not optional. It's your legal safeguard.

What Is the Chain of Custody?

The **Chain of Custody** is the **paper trail** that tracks a drug or alcohol test sample:

- From collection,
- Through transport,
- Into the lab,
- Through analysis,
- To the final reporting and storage of results.

Every handoff is documented. Every signature matters. This process ensures the sample wasn't tampered with, mislabeled, or mishandled at any point.



The Federal Custody and Control Form (CCF)

The **CCF** is the **official five-part document** required for all DOT drug tests. It accompanies the sample through every step.

Sections of the CCF:

- 1. Step 1 Donor info and reason for test (filled out by collector)
- 2. Step 2 Collection info (time, temperature, collector's signature)
- 3. Step 3 Lab shipment & security seals
- 4. Step 4 Laboratory testing and analysis
- 5. Step 5 Medical Review Officer (MRO) final result and certification

Manager Tip: Make sure your collection site uses the latest version of the DOT-approved CCF. Old or modified forms can invalidate a test.

The Collection Process: What Must Happen

- 1. Driver presents photo ID
- 2. Collector explains the process and provides instructions
- 3. Driver washes hands, enters restroom alone
- 4. Collection of **45 mL urine sample** under secure, private conditions
- 5. Collector checks sample temperature (within 4 minutes)
- Sample is split into two bottles:
 - **Bottle A** (primary sample)

- Bottle B (confirmation sample)
- 7. Both bottles are sealed with tamper-evident tape
- 8. CCF is completed and signed by both collector and donor
- 9. Sample is placed into **shipping box** with chain-of-custody documentation
- 10. Sample is shipped to HHS-certified lab via secure courier

Pro Tip: If there's any issue—shy bladder, suspected tampering, refusal—document everything immediately and notify your TPA or DER (Designated Employer Representative).

Who's Involved in the Chain of Custody?

Role	Responsibility
Collector	Performs collection and initiates CCF
Lab Personnel	Receives, inspects, and tests samples
MRO (Medical Review Officer)	Reviews results, contacts donor if needed, and reports final findings to the employer
DER (Designated Employer Representative)	Receives and handles test results on behalf of the employer



📤 How You Receive Results

- Negative results: Often received within 24–48 hours via secure portal or email from the lab or TPA
- Positive, refused, or tampered tests: MRO will attempt to contact the driver first, then report findings to you directly
- All final results should be filed separately from general personnel files in a confidential, secure location

Why This Matters

- If the chain is broken, your test result may not hold up in a dispute
- In a crash investigation or litigation, flawed sample handling = liability
- FMCSA can invalidate results, fine the carrier, or flag you for audit

Best Practices

V	Task
	Work only with DOT-compliant collection sites and TPAs
	Regularly audit your CCFs for completeness and signature accuracy
	Maintain a designated DER to receive and manage results
	Keep test results confidential and separately stored
	Train staff on how to handle refusals , shy bladder , or suspicious behavior

Bottom Line

Chain of custody is **your legal shield**. If it's done right, your results will stand up to audits, lawsuits, and claims of unfair testing. If it's done wrong—**even once**—your credibility (and your case) crumbles.

The chain is only as strong as your weakest link. Don't let it be your test process.

Part 4: Return-to-Duty and Follow-Up Requirements

"If they fail a test, it's not the end—but the comeback has strict rules."

When a driver fails a DOT drug or alcohol test—or refuses to take one—they must be **immediately removed** from all safety-sensitive functions. But that doesn't necessarily mean they're done forever.

FMCSA allows for a **Return-to-Duty (RTD)** process—but it's a highly regulated path that involves substance abuse counseling, monitored testing, and direct oversight. **You can't skip any of it.**

This section walks you through **exactly what happens after a violation**—and what *must* happen before that driver can legally return to the road.

Nhen Is Return-to-Duty Required?

Anytime a driver:

- Tests positive for a DOT drug or alcohol screen
- **Refuses** a test (which = automatic violation)
- Tampered with or adulterated a sample
- Is **reported** to the Clearinghouse for a violation

They must complete the **SAP process** and return-to-duty steps before operating a CMV again.

Manager Tip: Removal must happen **immediately**, even if you disagree with the result. Let the process play out—don't risk your authority.

Step 1: Substance Abuse Professional (SAP) Evaluation

- Driver must meet with a DOT-qualified SAP
- SAP evaluates the driver and creates a treatment/education plan
- SAP provides you (the employer) with a written follow-up plan
- You do not choose the treatment—the SAP does
- The employer must **not interfere or alter** the plan in any way

Find a DOT-qualified SAP here:

https://www.transportation.gov/odapc/sap-list

Step 2: Return-to-Duty Test

Once the driver completes their SAP plan:

- SAP will authorize a return-to-duty test
- You must send the driver for directly observed testing
- The test must return negative
- Only then can the driver return to **any** safety-sensitive duty (not just driving)

Important: A second positive = the **process starts over**. No shortcuts.

📆 Step 3: Follow-Up Testing

After the driver returns to duty:

- They are subject to at least 6 tests in the first 12 months
- Testing may continue for **up to 60 months** (5 years)
- All follow-up tests must be:
 - Unannounced
 - Directly observed
 - Separate from random testing pool

You, the employer, are responsible for ensuring follow-up tests happen exactly as SAP outlines—no more, no less.

Manager Tip: These tests **cannot be substituted** with random tests. They must be **in addition to** any required random pool testing.

Documentation Requirements

Required Record	Retain For
SAP referral and evaluation summary	5 years
Return-to-duty test result	5 years
Follow-up test schedule from SAP	5 years
Follow-up test results	5 years
Records of driver removal and reinstatement	5 years

Store separately from personnel files and under strict confidentiality.

Nhat You Cannot Do

- X Allow a driver to return to duty before receiving a negative RTD test
- X Skip the SAP process—even if the driver "seems fine"
- X Replace follow-up tests with random ones
- X Choose your own SAP or alter the follow-up plan
- Let the driver perform any safety-sensitive duties (even yard moves) during the process

Bottom Line

The Return-to-Duty process isn't just policy—it's **law**. FMCSA takes violations seriously, and skipping even one step can result in:

Hefty fines

- Audit failures
- Loss of operating authority
- Legal exposure if a relapse leads to an incident

If your driver violates Part 382, handle it by the book—or prepare to be shut down.



Part 5: Supervisor Responsibilities and Training

"If they smell it, see it, or suspect it—they own it."

Under FMCSA Part 382, supervisors of CDL drivers aren't just managers—they're compliance enforcers. Supervisors are legally required to recognize signs of impairment and take **immediate action** when there's reasonable suspicion of drug or alcohol use.

But here's the catch: they can't do that unless they've been properly trained. And if they act without that training—or worse, ignore signs altogether—you're risking violations, lawsuits, and full-on FMCSA scrutiny.



What FMCSA Requires (382.603)

Any company that employs CDL drivers must provide at least one supervisor with reasonable suspicion training that covers:

Training Area	Minimum Duration	
Alcohol misuse detection	60 minutes	
Controlled substances detection	60 minutes	

This training must be completed before a supervisor makes any testing referral based on suspicion.



Supervisor's Legal Duties

Task Description Observe Watch for signs of drug or alcohol use on duty Record specific, contemporaneous observations (time, behavior, appearance, Documen etc.) Immediately remove the driver from duty and initiate a reasonable suspicion Act test Follow up Ensure driver remains off duty until compliant with Return-to-Duty process



What Supervisors Must Look For

Observable Signs Category

Behavior Aggression, confusion, poor coordination, inappropriate

reactions

Speech Slurred, incoherent, rapid or slow

Appearance Bloodshot eyes, dilated pupils, sweating, disheveled appearance

Odor Smell of alcohol, marijuana, chemical masking agents

Motor skills Stumbling, swaying, dropping items, trouble with paperwork

Pro Tip: "Hunches" or third-party reports are not enough. You need specific, observed behaviors documented by a trained supervisor.



Documentation Requirements

Every reasonable suspicion event must include:

- Driver name and time of observation
- Specific signs or symptoms observed
- Date and time of testing referral
- Supervisor name (must be trained)

Result of action taken (test completed, driver removed, etc.)

Keep these reports **confidential**, stored for **at least 1 year**, and separate from the driver's general personnel file.

Best Practices for Supervisor Compliance

V	Task
	Require all supervisors to complete DOT-approved reasonable suspicion training
	Document training completion with certificates or attendance logs
	Provide refresher training every 2–3 years
	Use a standardized reasonable suspicion report form
	Ensure trained supervisor is always available during driving shifts
	Empower supervisors to remove a driver immediately if warranted—no permission needed
	Manager Tip: Make sure your night/weekend leads are also trained—violations don't keep a 9–5 schedule.

® Bottom Line

Your supervisors are the **first line of defense** against drug and alcohol violations—and FMCSA knows it. If you don't train them, or if they fail to act, **your entire company is on the hook**.

Train them. Document it. And back them when they do the right thing.

Part 6: Sample Testing Program Checklist

"If an auditor walked in today, would your program survive?"

Whether you manage a dozen CDL drivers or a fleet of hundreds, FMCSA doesn't care about your intentions—they care about your **process**. Every test, every file, every form must be handled by the book. This final checklist pulls together everything covered in Section 3 and gives you a **clear, audit-ready reference** to build or review your program.

	📋 General Program Setup					
V	Requirement					
	Written drug and alc	ohol policy, compliant with 49 CFR Part 382				
	Designated Employer Representative (DER) identified and trained					
	All CDL drivers enrolled in testing pool before assignment					
	Use of a DOT-comp	liant TPA or Consortium for collections and random testing				
	Testing rates meet c	urrent FMCSA minimums (50% drugs / 10% alcohol)				
	Secure, confidential storage of all test results and reports (separate from personnel files)					
Test Types – Coverage & Records						
∕ T	est Types – Cove	rage & Records				
/ T	est Types – Cove Test Type	rage & Records Key Notes				
/ T	••					
V	Test Type	Key Notes				
V	Test Type Pre-employment	Key Notes Negative result on file before driver is dispatched				
	Test Type Pre-employment Random	Key Notes Negative result on file before driver is dispatched Unannounced, scientifically random, spread throughout year				
	Test Type Pre-employment Random Post-accident Reasonable	Key Notes Negative result on file before driver is dispatched Unannounced, scientifically random, spread throughout year Proper documentation of criteria met or not met Supervisor-trained, documented observation, test conducted				



V	Requirement
	All tests use the current DOT Custody and Control Form (CCF)
	All samples are split into Bottle A and Bottle B
	Sample temperature is checked and recorded within 4 minutes
	Collector and donor signatures are completed and verified
	Samples are sealed with tamper-evident tape and tracked to the lab
	MRO reports all results directly to DER through secure system
	Refusals, shy bladder, or tampering events are documented immediately and reported per FMCSA procedure
🤵 R	Return-to-Duty & Follow-Up Process
V	Requirement
	SAP referral and evaluation documented after violation
	SAP treatment/education plan followed without interference
	Negative RTD test result received before driver returns to duty
	Follow-up test schedule implemented exactly per SAP instructions
	All RTD/follow-up results retained for at least 5 years
§ S	supervisor Training
V	Requirement
	At least one supervisor per location has completed reasonable suspicion training
	Training covers 60 minutes on alcohol, 60 minutes on controlled substances
	Records of training completion are maintained (certificates or attendance logs)
	Standard reasonable suspicion documentation form available

	Supervisor has authority to remove a driver immediately if impairment is observed
F	MCSA Clearinghouse Compliance
V	Requirement
	All CDL drivers are registered in the FMCSA Drug & Alcohol Clearinghouse
	Pre-employment full query conducted and stored
	Annual limited queries conducted for all active CDL drivers
	All violations and return-to-duty completions reported to the Clearinghouse by DER or TPA
	Consent forms (electronic or paper) retained for queries as required

Bottom Line

If you can check every box on this list—you're in great shape. If not, **start fixing it now**—because when FMCSA comes calling, they won't give you time to get your act together.

Compliant = safe, prepared, and audit-ready.

Manual Summary: FMCSR Compliance Guide for Fleet Managers

Built for the real world. Designed to keep your operation on the road.

Managing a large fleet isn't just about keeping trucks moving—it's about keeping them **moving legally, safely, and consistently** under the strict oversight of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSRs). This manual was written with one goal: to give fleet managers a **clear, practical, no-fluff guide** to the most critical parts of FMCSA compliance.

Over the course of these three sections, we've broken down the FMCSRs that impact your daily operations the most:

🔧 Section 1: Truck Regulations

- How to maintain your vehicles to FMCSA standards
- What equipment your trucks must have—and how to keep it legal
- How to document inspections, repairs, and DVIRs
- When your vehicle is at risk of being placed out of service
- Which vehicles are covered under the rules (and which aren't)

Section 2: Driver Regulations

- How to qualify and hire CDL drivers legally
- What goes in a Driver Qualification File (DQF)
- How to manage medical certifications, MVR reviews, and disqualifications
- The truth about Hours of Service (HOS) and what logs are required
- How driver behavior, roadside inspections, and violations affect your safety score

Section 3: Drug & Alcohol Testing

- Who must be tested—and exactly when
- The differences between pre-employment, random, post-accident, and follow-up tests
- How to protect your program through proper chain of custody
- What the Return-to-Duty process actually requires (no shortcuts)
- What your supervisors need to be trained on to handle real-world issues

How to structure a bulletproof testing program

🧠 Final Thought: Compliance Is Culture

This manual isn't about avoiding fines—it's about building a **safety-driven**, **audit-proof fleet operation**. If your team understands these rules, applies them consistently, and keeps documentation airtight, you'll stay ahead of DOT audits, insurance reviews, and crash liability exposure.

But it only works if you use it.

- Review this manual with your supervisors
- Use the checklists as living documents
- Update your policies and training based on what's inside
- Treat this as a working guide—not a binder that collects dust

The best fleets run smart, not scared. This manual helps you run smart.

HOS RULES CHEAT SHEET



DRIVE LIMIT

11-hour driving limit

May drive a maximum of 11 hours after 10 consecutive hours off duty



14-HOUR WINDOW

14-hour on-duty limit

May not drive after the 14th consecutive hour after coming on duty, following 10 hours off duty. Off-duty time does not extend



REST BREAKS

Mandatory breaks

Drivers must take a 30-minute break when they have driven for a period of 8 cumulative hours without at least a 30-minute interuption



60/70-HOUR LIMIT

Weekly on-duty limit

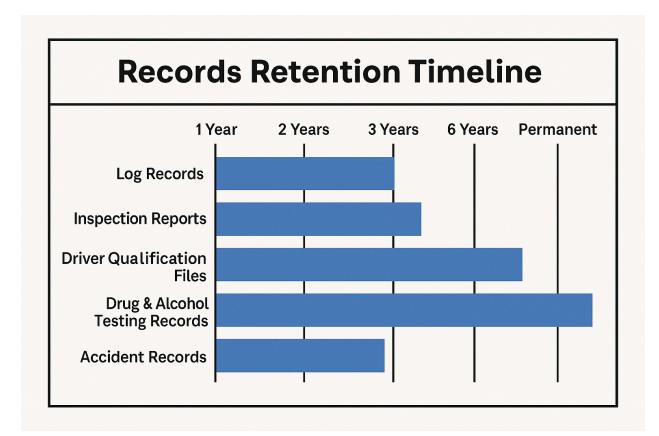
May not drive after 60/70 hours on duty in 7/8 consecutive days. A restart is allowed only after taking 34 consecutive hours off duty

SAMPLE DRIVER'S VEHICLE INSPECTION REPORT

Date		
Mileage	Carrier	
Address		
City	State	
Tractor/Truck No	Trailer No.	
DEFECTS OR D	EFICIENCIES	
Service Brakes, Including ABS		
Parking Brake		
Steering Mechanism		
Lighting Devices		
Tires		
Horn		
Windshield Wipers		
Rearview Mirrors		
Coupling Devices		
Wheels and Rims		
Other		
☐ Above defects corrected. ☐ Above defects need not be corrected for safewie-operation Date □ Above defects need not be corrected for safewie-operation		
DRIVER'S		
I have reviewed the previous inspection report and certify that the required repairs have performed.'		
Driver's Signature	Data	

Driver Disqualification Triggers

Violation	Disqualification Period	Action Required
Alcohol concentration ≥0,04	1 year	Driver removed from duty
Refusing a drug or alcohol test	1 year	Driver removed from duty
Leaving scene of an accident	1 year	Driver removed from duty
Using a CMV to commit a felony	1st: 1 year 2nd: Lifetime	Driver removed from duty
Reckless driving	- 60 days	Driver reviewed for disqualification
Excessive speeding (15+ over)	– 60 days	Driver reviewed for disqualification
Railroad crossing violation	60 days 120 days	Driver reviewed for disqualification



SUPERVISOR OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Document possible substance abuse by observing employees for:

Physical Signs		
 Unsteady or uncoorrdinated movements Bloodshot or watery eyes Flushed or pale complexion 		
Behavior Patterns		
☐ Erratic or unusual actions		
Confusion or disorientation		
☐ Drowsiness or hyperactivity		
Odor		
☐ Smell of alcohol		
☐ Smell of marijuana		
Speech		
☐ Slurred words		
Rapid or slow pace		
☐ Incoherent statements		
NOTES:		

PRE-TRIP / POST-TRIP INSPECTION QUICK CHECKLIST

	BRAKES	Brakes, hoses, lines, and connections
	STEERING	Steering mechanism, including steering wheel
	TIRES/ WHEELS	Tire inflation, tread, wheels, rims, and hhubs
	LIGHTS/ REFLECTORS	All lights, turn signals, reflectors in working order
	SUSPENSION	Frame, suspension system, airbags
	COUPLING DEVICES	Hitch, pintle hook, drawbar, mounting, safety devices
	WINDSHIELD	Wipers, windshield condition
	FUEL & FLUIDS	Fuel tank, level, under-hood fluids
	LOAD SECUREMENT	Cargo properly secured, not shifting
DEFECTS MUST BE NOTED ON DVIR		

DO NOT OPERATE UNSAFE VEHICLES

DOT Audit Prep Master Checklist

Before a new entrant audit or compliance review:

Vehicle Files

- Maintenance and repair records for one year
- Annual inspection reports (14 months)
- Proof of periodic inspections
- Markings showing DOT number and company name
- Accident register (past 3 years)

Hours of Service

- All RODS, ELO records, or time records for past 6 months
- Supporting documents (fuel receipts, tolls, etc.)
- HOS policy and carrier
 DOT number on ELD display
- Certification of no log violations (if required)

Driver Files

- Driver qualification files for each driver
- Medical certificates (within expiration dates)
- Records of violations or disqualifications
- Previous employer safety performance history or investigations
- Road test certifications

Other Records

- Proof of financial responsibility (insurance coverage)
- Company policies including those for safety
- HazMat training recods (if applicable)

Other Records

 Proof of financial responsibility (insurance coverage)

Top 10 Out-of-Service Triggers: Quick Reference Checklist

Post in dispatch. Review with drivers. Keep trucks on the road.

USE THIS LIST TO CATCH THE BIGGEST RED FLAGS BEFORE DOT DOES.

These are the most common roadside violations that will shut a truck down on the spot.

#	Inspection Item	What to Check For	OOS If
1	Brakes	Air leaks, brake stroke limits, cracked linings	Air loss or pushrod exceeds spec
2	Tires	Tread depth, inflation, visible damage	Cord showing or tire flat/underinflated
3	Lights	Brake lights, turn signals, marker/clearance lights	Any required light inoperative
4	Steering	Play in wheel, cracked components, loose steering shaft	Unsafe free play or broken parts
5	Suspension	Leaf springs, hangers, bushings, air ride	Broken or missing critical components
6	Wheels/Rims	Cracks, rust trails, lug nuts	Cracked or loose rims, missing lugs
7	Load Securement	Straps, chains, edge protectors, tiedowns	Load not properly secured or shifting
8	Coupling Devices	5th wheel lock, kingpin, safety chains	Cracks or missing locks/safety pins
9	Windshield Wipers	Blade condition, operation	Wipers inoperative during required use
10	Emergency Equipment	Fire extinguisher, triangles, fuses	Missing or expired equipment

X Tips for Managers:

- Use this checklist during **pre-trip coaching** with new drivers.
- Add it to your **dispatch board** or driver lounge area.
- Include in driver qualification or onboarding binders.

NEMEMBER: One violation = one vehicle off the road = lost time, money, and CSA points

Driver Qualification File (DQF) Checklist

FMCSA Part 391 Compliance - Hiring and File Maintenance

(DOT Card)

(ME #)

National Registry Verification

Previous Employer Safety

History Inquiries (391.23)

	Driver Information:	
•	☐ Driver Full Name:	
•	☐ Date of Hire:	
•	☐ Unit/Truck #:	
•	□ CDL #:	Class: State:
•	☐ Endorsements (if any):	
	Required at Time of H	lire·
V	Document	Notes
	Completed Driver Application	Signed and dated by applicant
	MVR(s) - Past 3 Years	From all states driver held license
	Pre-Employment Drug Test Results	Must be negative and dated before start
	Medical Examiner's Certificate	Must be current and from a listed examiner

Confirm examiner is listed at

https://nrcme.fmcsa.dot.gov

Keep responses or documentation of attempts

	Equivalent	(e.g. prior employer certificate)
#	Annual Requirements	<u>:</u>
V	Task	Due Date
	Annual MVR Review	Conducted and signed by company rep
	Certificate of Violations / No Violations	Must be signed by driver and kept for 3 years
*July * 17	Ongoing Compliance:	
V	Monitor	Notes
	Medical Certificate Expiration Da	te Track and update before expiration
	CDL Validity / Endorsements	Ensure CDL remains active and valid
	Drug & Alcohol Program Status	Ensure driver is enrolled and tested if required
₽ F	File Storage Notes:	
•	☐ All documents secured in DQF	folder (paper or digital)
•	☐ Retention: Keep DQF contents separation	for duration of employment + 3 years after
•	☐ Files are accessible and audit	-ready

Driver Disqualification Quick Guide

Based on FMCSA Parts 391.15 & 383.51 - For CDL and Non-CDL CMV Drivers



Major Disqualifying Offenses

One conviction of the following (in any vehicle):

Offense	Disqualification Period
DUI (alcohol or drugs)	1 year (3 years if hazmat)
Refusing a BAC test	1 year
Leaving the scene of an accident	1 year
Using CMV in commission of a felony	1 year
Driving a CMV with a suspended/revoked license	1 year
Second offense (any above)	Lifetime disqualification
Drug/human trafficking in a CMV	Lifetime (no reinstatement)



Serious Traffic Violations (2+ in 3 years = Disqualified)

Violation	Examples
Speeding 15+ mph over	80 in a 65 zone
Reckless driving	Road rage, aggressive lane use
Improper lane change	Cutting off traffic without signaling
Following too closely	"Tailgating"
Driving without CDL	Or without proper class/endorsement
Cell phone use/texting in CMV	Holding device, typing, or calling

- 2 offenses = 60-day disqualification
- 3+ offenses = 120-day disqualification

Drug & Alcohol Triggers (Part 382 Summary)

Trigger Action

Positive drug/alcohol test Immediate removal, SAP referral required

Test refusal Immediate disqualification

Driving under the influence Disqualified + additional legal penalties

Failed return-to-duty follow-up Disqualification continues

Fleet Manager Checklist

V	Task
	Monitor MVRs at least annually (recommended: every 6 months)
	Verify CDL and endorsements are current
	Remove driver immediately upon disqualification
	Document all disqualification events and resolutions
	Track SAP completion for drug/alcohol violations
	Don't assign a disqualified driver to any safety-sensitive function

REMEMBER:

Disqualified means no driving, no dispatching, no loading, no exceptions. Violation = Federal fine + full carrier liability.



Chain of Custody Process Overview

FMCSA Part 382 – DOT Drug Testing Compliance



What Is It?

The Chain of Custody is the documented, step-by-step process that tracks a DOT drug test sample from collection to result, ensuring security, accuracy, and legal defensibility.

Key Document: Federal Custody and Control Form (CCF)

The CCF is a **five-part DOT form** that follows the sample through every stage:

Step	Description
Step 1	Donor info & reason for test (collector completes)
Step 2	Collection details (time, temp, volume)
Step 3	Shipment prep & tamper seal applied
Step 4	Lab processing, test results
Step 5	MRO final review & employer report

Sample Collection Steps (Observed Only for Certain Tests)

1. Donor presents valid photo ID

- Collector explains test and process
- 3. Donor washes hands (no soap allowed)
- 4. Collector provides collection cup and instructions
- 5. Donor enters restroom alone (unless directly observed)
- 6. 45 mL urine collected, temperature checked within 4 minutes
- 7. Sample is **split** into Bottle A & Bottle B
- 8. Bottles sealed with tamper-proof tape
- 9. Chain-of-custody form completed and signed by both parties
- 10. Sample packaged and shipped to HHS-certified lab

Who's Involved?

Role Responsibility

Collector Handles collection, paperwork, and

shipment

Laboratory Receives sample and performs testing

MRO (Medical Review Officer) Reviews results and reports to DER

DER (Designated Employer Rep) Receives and manages results for employer

Best Practices for Carriers

V	IdSK
	Use only DOT-compliant collectors & labs
	Verify updated CCF forms are used
	Store test results securely & separately from personnel files

Audit CCFs regularly for signature errors or omissions Train supervisors on how to handle refusals or observed behavior issues

Nhat Can Break the Chain?

- Missing signatures or dates
- Mismatched bottle seals or labels
- Use of outdated or incorrect CCF
- Improper sample handling or storage
- Unsecured transit or undocumented transfer of custody

Reminder:

A broken chain of custody = invalid test = liability in court or audit. Protect your company. Document everything.