

RiskTopics

Effectiveness of the Pre-Employment Screening Program for commercial vehicle drivers

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's study indicated that motor carriers using the Pre-employment Screening Program (PSP) experienced a statistically greater reduction in crashes and driver out-of-service rates.¹

Introduction

Most organizations recognize the importance of properly screening candidates who will drive commercial motor vehicles. Using the information available to select the most qualified person is a powerful tool in helping to create a safety culture and reduce auto losses.

Since May 2010, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) has been providing valuable insight into a driver's roadside inspection history through the Pre-Employment Screening Program (PSP). What makes this information so powerful is the fact that it reports on roadside inspection data, which is normally not available on a Motor Vehicle Record (MVR). This RiskTopic reviews how using the PSP system can help motor carriers better identify potentially higher-risk drivers to help improve safety on the road.

Discussion and guidance

Benefits to utilizing PSP

The FMCSA conducted a study to determine how many motor carriers are using PSP and if it has helped to improve their road safety performance in areas such as collisions and driver out-of-service violations. The FMCSA sought to identify whether motor carriers that use the PSP have realized positive safety results since its inception. For this study, the FMCSA only reviewed the motor carrier's use of the PSP system and did not consider other aspects of a motor carrier's safety and compliance programs.

The study indicated that motor carriers using PSP lowered their crash rates by 8% and driver out-of-service rates by 17% on average.¹

In summary, the benefits of PSP may include the following:

- Support reduced liability by helping satisfy the expectation that companies who operate heavy vehicles should use available tools to support proper driver screening.
- Report on inspection histories, driver's behavior, possible conduct of duties violations and even vehicle crashes that may not be available through other background, work history or investigative tool.
- Provide the company names of past employers where the applicant operated a commercial vehicle and experienced a roadside inspection. This may help to identify work history gaps on the employment application.
- Offer an opportunity to understand a driver's past challenges so that they can be coached for success if they are hired.
- Identify drivers with a history of significant vehicle and equipment violations. Keep in mind that these may represent a lack of knowledge, indifference to violations or even the possibility that their previous motor carrier may have had inadequate maintenance programs. Whatever the case, this would be a good topic to address in pre-hire interviews and follow-up training.

How do I get PSP data?

PSP's are for pre-employment screening purposes only and cannot be obtained for existing drivers already employed. Motor carriers who don't run PSP's during the pre-hire process cannot obtain this information after a driver is hired.

In order to obtain a PSP a motor carrier must have an on-line account with the FMCSA. Once enrolled in the program, a motor carrier will be provided credentials to access the PSP online service. Once registered a motor carrier may access PSP records for new hires; currently for a \$10 fee per report.² Please note that motor carriers **MUST** obtain written permission from the driver prior to ordering and viewing the PSP report for that driver. A listing of these charges appears on the FMCSA website (<http://www.psp.fmcsa.dot.gov>). Additionally, there are some third-party services that can support a motor carrier to obtain and analyze PSP records.

Drivers also have access to their own PSP data. Drivers are not required to formally enroll in the program but a current fee of \$10 is charged to them to obtain their own PSP record.²

Important considerations

Keep in mind that the PSP is only one tool when screening a potential new hire. Ultimately, professional judgment and informed cross-referencing and examination of the prospective driver's background are essential to getting the most out of the driver screening process.

When reviewing the PSP, remember that some drivers may have had more or less DOT inspections than other drivers. The existence of inspections in itself generally may have more to do with the type of operation than the quality of the driver. Variables to consider include the following:

- It is not unusual for entry-level drivers to have fewer employer choices when they start. If they work for a company that allows violation of regulations, they may not be able to transfer to a different company until they have enough experience.

- Drivers who work for fleets that use transponder inspection lane bypass units may not face as much scrutiny as drivers whose fleets don't use these devices.
- Drivers who regularly operate in an area passing through or near vehicle inspection stations may be inspected more frequently.
- Local drivers may have little or no exposure to commercial vehicle enforcement activities or conversely operate daily in an area where they have a high level of exposure to inspections.
- While the PSP program includes drivers who do not hold a Commercial Driver's License (CDL), inspections tend to be less frequent for this group and thus potentially less indicative.
- It is possible for incorrect information to appear on the PSP. The FMCSA website details how a driver can appeal this information to have it removed or adjusted. Consider training your drivers to periodically review their own records for errors.

Some drivers work for more than one employer at the same time. If a driver furnished one motor carrier is in the second carrier's service for a period of seven consecutive days or more, the driver becomes a regularly employed driver of the second motor carrier and must meet qualification requirements³, at which time the new carrier may conduct a PSP.

Conclusion

The FMCSA's study identifies benefits to using the PSP system as part of a comprehensive safety and compliance program. Considering the relatively low cost of obtaining additional insight into on-road driver behaviors, companies that operate heavy fleets should consider the value of incorporating this tool into their commercial motor vehicle driver screening process.

You can learn more about this program from the FMCSA website for the Pre-employment Screening Program at <https://www.psp.fmcsa.dot.gov>.

Tools

List of violation impact/severity and driver accountability for PSP can be found on the FMCSA's Compliance, Safety, Accountability (CSA) website.

<https://csa.fmcsa.dot.gov/Documents/SMSMethodology.pdf>

A "Drivers Qualification File Checklist" and "Sample Commercial Driver Application" can be found in the FMCSA publication *A Motor Carrier's Guide to Improving Highway Safety*

<https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/safety/carrier-safety/motor-carriers-guide-improving-highway-safety>

References

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2. Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. *Frequently Asked Questions about the Pre-Employment Screening Program*. n.d. 23 November 2016. <<https://www.psp.fmcsa.dot.gov/psp/FAQ.aspx>>.
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