

# FREIGHT CARRIER SAFETY:

## The Straight Scoop on CSA Scores

Three years into the Compliance, Safety, Accountability (CSA) program, shippers routinely consider CSA scores when choosing a freight carrier. But what's the real meaning behind the metrics? Are there other ways to assess a carrier's safety record? Gary Funk, Landair's senior vice president for truckload operations, recently sat down for a talk about safety from the shipper's perspective.



**Gary Funk**  
SVP, Truckload Operations  
Landair

**Q: You believe it's important for shippers to know the CSA program's original intent. Why?**

**A:** The original idea behind CSA was to let carriers know about safety issues they might be experiencing, so we could then take action to shore up driver training or maintenance practices. That's important for shippers to know because it's still how carriers should

approach CSA. It's not something to be resentful of if your BASIC scores are high. It's not even something necessarily to brag about if your scores are low. Bottom line, it's a tool to improve safety. And if a carrier sounds or acts defensive about CSA, that might be a sign they have issues around how they think about and manage safety.

**Q: If you were a shipper, how would you go about evaluating a carrier's CSA scores?**

**A:** First keep in mind that CSA ranks carriers in peer groups, based on the size of their tractor fleet. In that type of ranking, somebody ends up on top, somebody at the bottom. That doesn't automatically mean carriers with higher scores are flat-out unsafe. It's like ranking Ivy League universities. If you have to place one on top, does it mean the school at the bottom is bad?

Also, when I'm looking at a carrier's BASIC scores online and see a DOT alert, I wouldn't automatically disqualify that carrier. Instead I'd click on the History button and page back through the data, to see whether they've shown an ability to improve their scores over time. That's an indication they're taking safety seriously, and they're probably using CSA scores in a constructive way, as they were intended.

**Q: Are there even better ways to measure a carrier's safety track record?**

**A:** I can't say necessarily "better," but DOT's safety rating is another factor shippers might want to look at. Long before CSA, DOT had its three-level scale: satisfactory, conditional, unsatisfactory. It's still a good indicator of a carrier's safety and commitment. A freight carrier should be able to give you their DOT rating, and how long they've kept that rating.

**Q: What else should shippers investigate or think about when it comes to carrier safety?**

**A:** Judging by inquiries and RFPs we receive at Landair, I'd say shippers are pretty aware of the vicarious liability they can face working with a less-than-safe carrier. So they're fairly thorough about asking smart questions. If anything, I'd say it never hurts to talk directly to a carrier's safety or risk manager. Often you'll get the best sense for whether safety is ingrained in their culture, or more of a program or a slogan, by talking directly to their people.

BASICs Overview		What Does This Mean?	PERFORMANCE		BASICs Status
<small>(Based on a 24-month record ending October 25, 2013)</small>					
Unsafe Driving	0%				
Hours-of-Service (HOS) Compliance	< 3 driver insp.				
Driver Fitness	< 5 driver insp.				
Controlled Substances and Alcohol	0%				
Vehicle Maintenance	< 5 vehicle insp.				
Hazardous Materials (HM) Compliance	Not Public		Not Public		Not Public
Crash Indicator	Not Public		Not Applicable		Not Public

USE OF SMS DATA/INFORMATION

History

For more information on the BASICs Overview please visit our Information Center

When shippers visit [csa.fmcsa.dot.gov](http://csa.fmcsa.dot.gov) to check CSA scores, it pays to view a carrier's history, not merely its current BASIC scores.