

## **Federal Rules That Often Shape Indiana Truck Accident Cases**

### **Our Indiana attorneys fight to hold negligent trucking companies accountable**

The moment a fully loaded tractor trailer slams into a smaller vehicle on an Indiana highway, everything changes for the family in that car. In the chaos that follows, it can feel like the [truck accident](#) came out of nowhere. But in many cases, the attorneys at [Boughter Sinak, LLC](#) find that the collision started hours, weeks, or even months earlier when a trucking company chose to ignore the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) [safety rules](#) that were written to prevent exactly this kind of harm.

When those rules are broken and someone gets hurt, they become powerful evidence in an Indiana truck accident case about what went wrong and who should be held accountable. Here's what you should know about how FMCSA rules apply to truck accident cases.

### **What Are FMCSA Rules and Why Do They Matter in Indiana Crashes?**

FMCSA is the federal agency that oversees interstate commercial trucking throughout the country, including trucks that travel through Indiana. These regulations set minimum safety standards for hours of service, vehicle inspection and maintenance, driver qualification, drug and alcohol testing, cargo securement, and electronic logging, all with the goal of reducing serious crashes involving large trucks.

When a truck driver or trucking company violates an FMCSA rule and that violation contributes to a crash, the breach can serve as [evidence of negligence](#) in an Indiana injury claim. In some situations, courts may treat a clear violation of a safety regulation as negligence per se, which means duty and breach are effectively established and the focus shifts to whether the violation caused the collision and how badly the victim was hurt.

For families coping with an Indiana truck accident, this is more than legal theory; it's the bridge between "a truck accident happened" and "someone broke safety rules and should pay for the harm they caused."

### **How Do Federal Rules Fit into Indiana Negligence Law?**

Indiana truck accident cases still rest on the basic negligence elements of duty, breach, causation, and damages, but FMCSA rules help define what the duty of care looks like for commercial truckers and carriers. Ordinary drivers are expected to act reasonably; professional drivers operating vehicles over 10,000 pounds and hauling freight across state lines are held to a higher standard informed by detailed federal regulations.

Violating a safety rule meant to prevent a particular type of harm can trigger negligence per se, meaning the defendant is presumed negligent if the injured person is in the protected class and the harm is the sort the regulation was designed to prevent. Indiana courts have applied this concept in truck cases by looking at whether specific FMCSA provisions were intended to protect other road users from collisions with commercial motor vehicles and whether the evidence supports a direct link between the violation and the crash.

### **How Do Hours of Service Violations Influence Fault?**

One of the most important sets of FMCSA rules in Indiana truck accident litigation involves [hours-of-service](#), or HOS, which limit how long a driver can be on duty before resting. For most property-carrying drivers, the core rules include:

- **Eleven-hour driving limit:** A truck driver may drive up to 11 hours only after 10 consecutive hours off duty.
- **Fourteen hour driving window:** The driver can't drive beyond the 14th consecutive hour after coming on duty, even if the full 11 hours of drive time haven't been used.
- **Thirty-minute break requirement:** After 8 cumulative hours of driving, the driver must take at least a 30-minute interruption from driving.
- **Sixty- or seventy-hour weekly limit:** Drivers can't drive after 60 hours on duty in 7 days, or 70 hours in 8 days, until they take a qualifying reset period.

### **How Do Maintenance Violations Lead to Indiana Crashes?**

FMCSA maintenance and inspection rules require carriers to systematically inspect, repair, and maintain their vehicles so that no truck is operated in a condition that is likely to cause an accident or breakdown. Drivers must perform pre-trip and post-trip inspections, note defects affecting safety, and carriers must keep records of inspections, repairs, and periodic annual checks.

When companies cut corners on maintenance, the consequences can be catastrophic. Worn brakes increase stopping distance and can turn a manageable slowdown into a multi-vehicle pileup on I-70. Tire defects and blowouts can cause sudden loss of control or force trucks into adjacent lanes, while poor lighting or reflective markings can make trailers nearly invisible at night and invite rear-end crashes.

### **What Do FMCSA Rules Say About Driver Qualification and Training?**

FMCSA driver qualification standards are meant to ensure that only safe, medically fit, and properly licensed drivers operate large commercial vehicles. Problems arise when carriers hire drivers with poor safety histories, inadequate experience, or lapsed medical certifications, or when they fail to perform the required checks at all.

In an Indiana case, discovering that a driver had multiple prior preventable crashes or serious moving violations that were overlooked can support negligent hiring and supervision claims on top of the basic negligence claim for the crash itself.

We often see that incomplete or outdated driver qualification files go hand in hand with minimal training on subjects such as hours-of-service compliance, winter driving in Indiana, and proper cargo securement. When a company fails to train and monitor a driver in line with FMCSA standards, and that lack of preparation contributes to a serious collision, it becomes much harder for the defense to argue the crash was unforeseeable.

### **How Do Drug and Alcohol Testing Rules Affect a Case?**

FMCSA rules require trucking companies to conduct pre-employment, random, reasonable suspicion, and qualifying post-accident [drug and alcohol tests](#) for covered drivers. The idea is straightforward: anyone operating an 80,000-pound rig needs to be unimpaired every time they get behind the wheel.

Violations of these testing rules show up in several ways. Some carriers fail to conduct required post-accident tests after serious crashes, others manipulate timing to minimize the chance of detecting a substance, and some keep such poor records that it is unclear whether random testing programs are truly active. When our attorneys see missing test results where the FMCSA requires testing, it raises serious questions about whether the company turned a blind eye to potential impairment.

If we uncover documented positive tests or refusals that the carrier ignored, allowing a driver to continue operating on Indiana highways, that evidence may support a request for punitive damages. In many cases, just revealing that history in discovery materially changes the defendant's appetite for taking the case to trial.

### **How Can Cargo Securement and Overloading Decide a Claim?**

FMCSA cargo securement and weight rules are designed to prevent loads from shifting, falling, or overloading a vehicle to the point that it becomes unsafe. Drivers and carriers must ensure that cargo is properly blocked or tied down and that axles and gross vehicle weight stay within applicable limits, with special securement rules for high-risk loads like logs, steel coils, and heavy machinery.

When these rules are ignored, the physics of a heavy load can overwhelm even an attentive driver. Shifting cargo can cause a trailer to sway or tip during lane changes or on highway ramps, and overloaded trailers can strain brakes, lengthen stopping distances, and lead to mechanical failures. In more dramatic cases, improperly secured freight can spill onto the roadway, leaving following drivers with no time or space to avoid debris.

In Indiana cargo-related cases, our firm works to secure bills of lading, scale tickets, load diagrams, and photographs from the scene that show spilled cargo or unusual trailer positions. Those documents help us identify not only violations of securement rules but also all responsible parties, including loading contractors and shippers, which can be important when insurance coverage from the trucking company alone isn't enough to cover the full extent of the losses.

### **Our Indiana Truck Accident Lawyers Know How to Use FMCSA Violations to Build Your Case**

The Indiana truck accident lawyers at Boughter Sinak, LLC have seen how uncovering violations of hours-of-service limits, maintenance rules, driver qualification standards, and other FMCSA regulations can transform an Indiana truck accident case from a [dispute about fault](#) into a clear story of rule breaking and preventable harm. When a family is facing hospital bills, lost income, and months or years of recovery, that difference can matter as much as the crash itself.

If you or a loved one was hurt in a crash with a commercial truck in Indiana, our attorneys are ready to dig into the records, uncover any FMCSA violations, and pursue full accountability from every responsible party. We invite you to [contact our law firm](#) for a no-pressure conversation about what happened. Our firm is ready to help you move forward.