

Key Federal Trucking Regulations That Often Come Up in Indiana Crash Cases

Our Indiana Truck Accident Lawyers Use Federal Rules to Build Your Case

In the seconds before a truck crash, everything can feel normal. Traffic flows along I-69, I-65, or US-30, headlights stretch ahead like a string of beads, and then one fully loaded semi closes distance faster than anyone expects. When impact happens, it feels sudden and senseless, but [Boughter Sinak, LLC](#) knows most serious [truck accidents](#) aren't random. They're the end result of choices, company policies, and violations of federal rules that were supposed to keep everyone safe.

Federal trucking regulations act like the guardrails of the industry, setting minimum standards for how long a trucker can drive, how often a rig must be inspected, and what kind of training and screening carriers must use before they put someone behind the wheel. When those guardrails are ignored, big trucks become far more dangerous than they should be.

What Is the FMCSA and Why Do Its Rules Matter in Indiana?

To understand why [federal regulations](#) play such a big role in Indiana truck accident cases, it helps to know who writes them and what they cover. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) is the federal agency responsible for setting and enforcing safety rules for most commercial trucks and buses that travel across state lines. If a truck is hauling freight through Indiana as part of an interstate route, there's a very good chance it's subject to these rules.

FMCSA regulations touch nearly every part of the trucking operation. They define:

- how many hours a driver can stay on duty before resting
- how often a truck must be inspected and maintained
- what it takes to qualify as a commercial driver
- when drug and alcohol testing is required
- how loads must be secured so they don't shift, spill, or destabilize a truck that's already challenging to control

These aren't just suggestions or best practices. They're minimum safety standards designed to prevent the exact types of tragedies we see on Indiana roads. When a driver or trucking company chooses to cut corners, that decision often shows up as a violation of an FMCSA rule, and that violation can become powerful evidence that they failed to use reasonable care.

How FMCSA Violations Help Prove Negligence

Negligence is about failing to act as a reasonably careful person or company would under the circumstances. With regular car crashes, that often means analyzing speeding, distraction, or failure to yield. With truck crashes, it could mean whether FMCSA rules were followed, because those rules spell out specific duties in far more detail than ordinary traffic laws.

When a truck driver ignores their hours-of-service limits and keeps driving while exhausted, or when a carrier postpones [brake repairs](#) to keep a truck on the road, they're not just bending an internal policy. They're violating federal safety standards that exist precisely because fatigue and mechanical failures are known causes of catastrophic crashes.

Key Federal Trucking Rules That Often Come Up

While the FMCSA rulebook is extensive, a handful of categories tend to appear again and again in serious Indiana truck cases. Understanding these can help you recognize what might be going on behind the scenes after a crash.

Hours-of-Service Rules That Limit Driving Time

The [hours-of-service rules](#) are at the heart of federal trucking safety. In plain terms, they limit how long a commercial truck driver can stay on duty and behind the wheel before resting. Drivers have a maximum number of hours they can drive in a day, a larger 14-hour duty window, mandatory rest breaks, and weekly limits designed to keep cumulative fatigue from building up.

These rules exist because fatigue affects the brain in much the same way as alcohol. Reaction times slow, judgment gets clouded, and it becomes harder to process what's happening on the road. On a busy stretch of I-65, that can mean failing to notice braking traffic until it's too late, or drifting out of a lane because a driver simply can't stay fully alert.

In real cases, we often see drivers pushed to run just a little farther, take one more load, or make up time after weather or traffic delays. Before electronic logging devices became standard, some drivers kept two sets of logbooks or simply filled them out to match what dispatch wanted to see. Even with electronic systems in place, pressure to "work the clock" still exists, and subtle forms of manipulation can show up when records are carefully compared.

Vehicle Inspection and Maintenance Requirements

Every commercial truck on the road is supposed to be part of a systematic inspection, repair, and maintenance program. Drivers are required to inspect their vehicles and document problems, and carriers must correct defects and ensure that unfit trucks don't leave the yard.

When that system breaks down, the consequences are often felt at highway speeds. Worn brake linings that should have been replaced hundreds of miles ago can dramatically increase stopping

distances. Bald tires can blow out under heavy loads. Steering or suspension problems can make sudden maneuvers unstable, especially in curves or during evasive action.

After a crash, we look closely at maintenance logs, repair invoices, inspection reports, and driver defect notes. If the same brake issue appears several times without timely repair, or if a required inspection was skipped entirely, it's much easier to argue that the collision was preventable.

Driver Qualification and Background Requirements

FMCSA rules don't just regulate machines, they regulate who's allowed to operate them. Commercial drivers must hold valid CDLs, pass periodic medical exams, and maintain driving records that don't reveal certain disqualifying offenses. Carriers are required to investigate a driver's prior employment, crash history, and moving violations and to keep that information in a qualification file.

When a company cuts corners on this process, it's usually not an innocent oversight. [Hiring a driver](#) with a history of drunk driving, repeated logbook violations, or serious moving violations and then sending that driver down Indiana highways in an 80,000-pound truck is a conscious decision to accept unnecessary risk.

For example, we might uncover that a driver had multiple preventable crashes and hours-of-service violations with prior employers, yet the current carrier never followed up or put additional safeguards in place. When that driver then [rear-ends someone](#) in slow traffic on I-69, the company can't credibly claim they had no warning.

Drug and Alcohol Testing Rules

To keep impaired drivers out of the cab, FMCSA requires [pre-employment drug testing](#), random testing, post-accident testing in certain situations, and return-to-duty and follow-up testing when a driver has previously tested positive or violated alcohol rules. Carriers must promptly remove drivers from safety-sensitive duties after certain results and can't simply ignore a failed test.

When a serious truck crash happens, we want to know not only what the post-accident tests show, but also whether the driver has a history of positive results, refusals, or missed follow-up obligations.

Cargo Securement and Loading Regulations

A truck that's properly loaded and secured is far more predictable on the road than [one that's not](#). FMCSA cargo securement regulations require loads to be arranged and restrained so they won't shift, fall, or alter the truck's balance during normal driving, braking, and cornering. That

includes using the right number and type of tie-downs, blocking and bracing cargo, and paying attention to weight distribution.

When those rules are ignored, trucks become more prone to rollovers, jackknife events, and lost-load incidents. A high, top-heavy load can make a truck feel stable until the driver makes a sudden lane change or navigates a curve too quickly. Loose cargo can break free in a hard stop, turning into deadly projectiles that strike vehicles behind the truck.

Responsibility for proper loading may rest with more than one party. Drivers are supposed to inspect loads and securement devices, but shippers, brokers, and third-party loading companies can also share blame when a dangerously loaded trailer leaves the dock.

Electronic Logging Device Requirements

Modern trucking relies heavily on electronic logging devices to track driving time accurately and reduce logbook fraud. Most interstate drivers must use ELDs that automatically record driving, on-duty, and off-duty time based on engine and movement data.

When we obtain ELD data, we can often see patterns that weren't obvious at first glance. A driver may consistently push to the edge of allowable hours, take very short rests, or show irregular breaks that don't match realistic rest habits. In some cases, discrepancies between ELD data, dispatch records, and GPS location information can indicate intentional manipulation or unsafe scheduling practices.

Because ELD data can be overwritten or lost over time, acting quickly to preserve it can make the difference between guessing at what the driver was doing before the crash and having a clear, full timeline.

How Boughter Sinak, LLC Uses Federal Rules to Protect Injured Hoosiers

Boughter Sinak, LLC treats federal rules as a detailed checklist of responsibilities that every truck driver and carrier operating in or through Indiana must follow. When we investigate a crash, we look beyond the surface facts and ask how those regulations were applied, ignored, or bent in the weeks and months before the wreck.

That often means obtaining and reviewing driver logs, ELD data, maintenance records, hiring files, drug and alcohol testing histories, and cargo documents, then working with industry professionals to interpret what those records really show.

If you were injured in a crash involving a commercial truck in Indiana and you suspect fatigue, poor maintenance, or other safety violations played a role, we're here to listen. [Contact us](#) online or call to schedule a free consultation with our attorneys, ask questions about what happened, and talk through your legal options.