DOT INSIGHT SERIES

Top 10 Violations Found During DOT Roadside Inspections (2025)

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Commercial motor vehicle roadside inspections are conducted throughout the United States by federal, state, and local enforcement agencies to ensure compliance with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSR). During a roadside inspection, enforcement officers evaluate both the driver and the vehicle for compliance with federal safety regulations. If serious violations are discovered, the driver or vehicle may be placed Out-of-Service (OOS) using the standards established in the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA) North American Standard Out-of-Service Criteria. According to data published by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) and the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA), thousands of violations are discovered during roadside inspections each year. While violations can occur in many areas, the majority fall into a small number of predictable categories.

1. Brake System Violations

49 CFR 393.40 – 393.55 | Approx. Citations: 398,000+

Brake system violations remain the most frequently discovered vehicle violations during roadside inspections. The braking system is one of the most critical safety components on a commercial motor vehicle, and enforcement officers carefully examine brake adjustment, brake hoses, brake linings, and overall brake functionality. Under the CVSA Out-of-Service Criteria, a vehicle may be placed out of service when 20 percent or more of the service brakes are defective.

- Brake adjustment out of specification
- Air leaks in brake hoses or lines
- Worn brake linings or pads
- Inoperative service brakes

2. Tire Violations

49 CFR 393.75 | Approx. Citations: 192,000+

Tire violations are another leading category discovered during roadside inspections. Inspectors examine tires to ensure they meet minimum tread depth requirements and are free from defects such as exposed cords, cuts, bulges, or separation.

- Insufficient tread depth
- Exposed tire cord or sidewall damage
- Flat or leaking tires
- Improper tire rating for the vehicle load

3. Lighting and Reflector Violations

49 CFR 393.9 | Approx. Citations: 217,000+

Lighting violations are frequently observed during roadside inspections because they are easily visible to enforcement officers. Broken or inoperative lighting systems can significantly reduce vehicle visibility and increase the risk of collisions.

- Inoperative tail lamps
- Broken or missing clearance lights
- Inoperative turn signals
- Missing reflectors

4. Hours of Service Violations

49 CFR 395.3 | Approx. Citations: 168,000+

Hours-of-Service regulations are designed to prevent driver fatigue and reduce crashes caused by tired drivers. During roadside inspections, officers review driver logs and Electronic Logging Device (ELD) records to verify compliance.

- Driving beyond the 11-hour driving limit
- Exceeding the 14-hour duty window
- Failure to take required rest breaks
- Violating the 60/70-hour rule

5. False or Inaccurate Records of Duty Status

49 CFR 395.8 | Approx. Citations: 6,800+

Drivers are required to maintain accurate records of duty status documenting their hours of service. Inspectors often compare logs with supporting documentation such as fuel receipts, shipping documents, and toll records.

- Log entries not matching supporting documents

- ELD data inconsistencies
- Failure to certify logs properly

6. Cargo Securement Violations

49 CFR 393.100 – 393.136 | Approx. Citations: 56,000+

Cargo must be properly secured to prevent it from shifting, falling, or leaking from the vehicle during transport. Cargo securement violations are particularly common among construction carriers, dump trucks, and flatbed operations.

- Insufficient tie-downs
- Damaged securement devices
- Unsecured cargo
- Dump truck loads not properly tarped

7. Driver Qualification Violations

49 CFR Part 391 | Approx. Citations: 52,000+

Drivers operating commercial motor vehicles must meet specific qualification requirements established by federal regulations. During roadside inspections, officers verify a driver's license status and medical certification.

- Expired medical certificates
- Invalid CDL
- Missing driver qualification documentation

8. Vehicle Maintenance Violations

49 CFR Part 396 | Approx. Citations: 44,000+

Motor carriers are required to systematically inspect, repair, and maintain commercial motor vehicles. Violations often occur when required inspections are not performed or when known defects are not repaired.

- Failure to repair defects
- Missing annual inspection
- Incomplete maintenance documentation

9. Safety Belt Violations

49 CFR 392.16 | Approx. Citations: 14,000+

Federal regulations require commercial motor vehicle drivers to wear safety belts while operating their vehicles. Failure to wear a safety belt significantly increases injury risk during crashes.

- Failure to wear a safety belt while operating a CMV

10. Overweight and Size Violations

49 CFR 658 and State Laws

Overweight violations occur when vehicles exceed legal axle or gross vehicle weight limits. These violations are particularly common among dump trucks, aggregate haulers, and construction carriers.

- Exceeding axle weight limits
- Exceeding gross vehicle weight limits
- Improper load distribution

Conclusion

DOT roadside inspections are a critical component of commercial motor vehicle safety enforcement. Motor carriers that emphasize preventative maintenance, driver training, and regulatory compliance can significantly reduce the likelihood of violations and out-of-service orders.

About the Author

This DOT Insight document was prepared by Kirk Marino, Transportation Safety Consultant and retired North Carolina State Highway Patrol Master Trooper with over 27 years of experience in commercial motor vehicle enforcement, roadside inspections, and transportation safety compliance.

Data Sources

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) Safety Measurement System (SMS) Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA) International Roadcheck Reports CVSA North American Standard Out-of-Service Criteria Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (49 CFR Parts 390–399)