



Highlights of [GAO-07-1074T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) has the primary federal responsibility for reducing crashes involving large trucks and buses. FMCSA uses its “SafeStat” tool to select carriers for reviews for compliance with its safety regulations based on the carriers’ crash rates and prior safety violations. FMCSA then conducts these compliance reviews and can place carriers out of service if they are found to be operating unsafely.

This statement is based on a recent report (GAO-07-585) and other nearly completed work. GAO assessed (1) the extent to which FMCSA identifies carriers that subsequently have high crash rates, (2) how FMCSA ensures that its compliance reviews are conducted thoroughly and consistently, and (3) the extent to which FMCSA follows up with carriers with serious safety violations. GAO’s work was based on a review of laws, program guidance, and analyses of data from 2004 through early 2006.

## What GAO Recommends

In June, GAO recommended that FMCSA use a regression model approach to identify high-risk carriers. FMCSA agreed that this approach looks promising but is concerned that it results in less emphasis on other regulatory areas. GAO is considering several recommendations, including that FMCSA assess maximum penalties in situations which GAO believes the law requires.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-1074T](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-1074T).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Susan A. Fleming at (202) 512-2834 or [flemings@gao.gov](mailto:flemings@gao.gov).

# MOTOR CARRIER SAFETY

## Preliminary Information on the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration’s Efforts to Identify and Follow Up with High-risk Motor Carriers

### What GAO Found

FMCSA generally does a good job in identifying carriers that pose high crash risks for subsequent compliance reviews, ensuring the thoroughness and consistency of those reviews, and following up with high-risk carriers.

SafeStat is nearly twice as effective (83 percent) as random selection in identifying carriers that pose high crash risks. However, its effectiveness could be improved by using a statistical approach (negative binomial regression), which provides for a systematic assessment to apply weights to the four SafeStat safety evaluation areas (accidents and driver, vehicle, and safety management violations) rather than FMCSA’s approach, which relies on expert judgment. The regression approach identified carriers that had twice as many crashes in the subsequent 18 months as did the carriers identified by the current SafeStat approach. FMCSA is concerned that adopting this approach would result in it placing more emphasis on crashes and less emphasis on compliance with its safety management, vehicle, and driver regulations. GAO believes that because (1) the ultimate purpose of compliance reviews is to reduce the number and severity of truck and bus crashes and (2) GAO’s and others’ research has shown that crash rates are stronger predictors of future crashes than is poor compliance with FMCSA’s safety regulations, the regression approach would improve safety.

GAO’s preliminary assessment is that FMCSA promotes thoroughness and consistency in its compliance reviews through its management processes, which meet GAO’s standards for internal controls. For example, FMCSA uses an electronic manual to record and communicate its compliance review policies and procedures and teaches proper compliance review procedures through both classroom and on-the-job training. Furthermore, investigators use an information system to document their compliance reviews, and managers review these data, helping to ensure thoroughness and consistency between investigators. For the most part, FMCSA and state investigators cover the nine major applicable areas of the safety regulations (e.g., driver qualifications and vehicle condition) in 95 percent or more of compliance reviews, demonstrating thoroughness and consistency.

GAO’s preliminary assessment is that FMCSA follows up with almost all carriers with serious safety violations, but it does not assess the maximum fines against all serious violators that GAO believes the law requires. FMCSA followed up with at least 1,189 of 1,196 carriers (99 percent) that received proposed unsatisfactory safety ratings from compliance reviews completed in fiscal year 2005. For example, FMCSA found that 873 of these carriers made safety improvements and it placed 306 other carriers out of service. GAO also found that FMCSA (1) assesses maximum fines against carriers for the third instance of a violation, whereas GAO reads the statute as requiring FMCSA to do so for the second violation and (2) does not always assess maximum fines against carriers with a pattern of varied serious violations, as GAO believes the law requires.