

# WHAT'S AN ISS SCORE AND WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

**T**here are many different ways safety is measured in trucking, but one gauge is particularly important in determining whether you get a green light or a red light from your truck weigh station bypass service.

*It's called an Inspection Selection System score, or ISS score, and it also has a deep effect on the number of times a truck is inspected by safety enforcement officers.*

*Drew Anderson, director of carrier relations for PrePass and a well-known subject matter expert on the Inspection Selection System, recently spoke with freelance trucking journalist Evan Lockridge regarding what factors make up an ISS score and what truck fleets and owner operators need to know about it.*

**Evan: It's good to talk with you, Drew. To begin with, can you explain what the Inspection Selection System is?**

Drew: The Inspection Selection System is the mechanism that the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) uses to prioritize motor carriers for scale pull-in at weigh stations and inspections based upon their safety profile. It primarily uses safety data from the FMCSA's Compliance Safety and Accountability program, commonly known as CSA.

**Evan: So how is an ISS score determined?**

Drew: The primary elements of the ISS score are a motor carrier's safety percentile ranking in CSA. The FMCSA takes each motor carrier's percentile rankings and places them into its blender, so to speak. Depending upon the combination of scores and their performance in the different CSA safety categories, known as Behavior Analysis and Safety Improvement Category, or BASICS for short, fleets will have a corresponding ISS score on a scale from zero to 100.

**Evan: Can you give me examples of a good score or a bad one?**

Drew: Sure. There are seven CSA BASICS. If a carrier is over the threshold in a CSA BASIC or what the FMCSA determines is an alert status, for example in the hazmat category, but are good on all the other BASIC scores, then the ISS score will probably be in the middle of the range (50s, 60s or 70s). That's not too bad. On the other hand, if a motor carrier has an alert status for the hours-of-service compliance BASIC, they're automatically going to have a high ISS score of between 75 and 100 because the hours-of-service BASIC is deemed to be more indicative of crash than an alert in the hazmat basic.

**Evan: This sounds a lot like the game of golf. Of course, safety isn't a game, but the goal is still to have the lowest score, correct?**

Drew: Exactly. And depending upon where a motor carrier falls within that range, the higher the score, the more likely they are going to be prioritized for an inspection. I should note the FMCSA is careful to use the word "prioritization." That's because it is simply an indicator to enforcement that this motor carrier is prioritized for closer scrutiny. ISS is a recommendation to enforcement, not a decree.

**Evan: Based upon what you have told me, the different CSA BASICS are weighted differently when it comes to using them to determine an ISS score.**

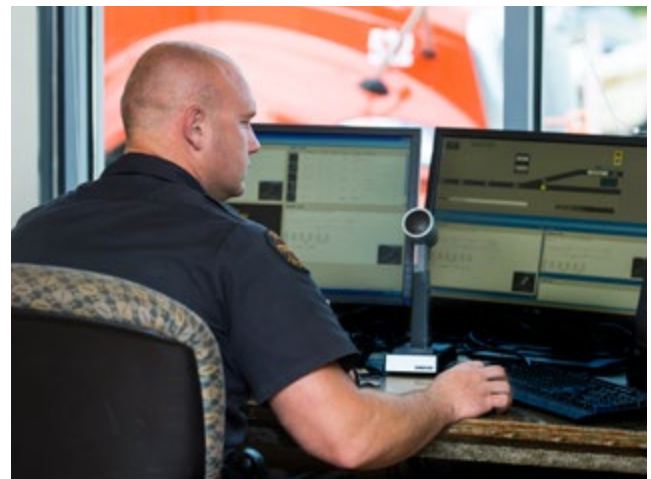
Drew: So the BASICS that get heavily weighted or prioritized, if you will, are "Unsafe Driving", which covers speeding, reckless driving, improper lane change, inattention and not wearing seatbelts, plus the "Hours-of-Service Compliance" basic, which covers noncompliance with hours-of-service regulations, including logbooks. In addition, there is the "Crash Indicator" BASIC, which considers a fleet's history of crash involvement. At a 5,000 foot view those are the three BASICS that ultimately have the most impact on an ISS score, with the FMCSA paying closest attention to Hours of Service.

**Evan: Are there any other major factors that go into determining an ISS score besides the CSA BASICS?**

Drew: Yes. Insurance status can go into your ISS score, though most truck fleets carry the proper insurance, so that's not much of a worry. Also fleet investigation results go into the score, whether it's

an on-site fixed investigation, or an off-site focused investigation. Regardless, if as a result of either type of investigation, safety inspectors find serious or critical violations, these can be factored into your ISS score. Additionally, there is a separate calculation for carriers with very few, or an "insufficient" number, of inspections with the purpose being to increase the number of carriers with inspection data in the system.

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**Evan: Now that you've explained what goes into an ISS score, and the lower it is the better it is, this brings me to another question. Does this automatically mean that someone driving a rig for a trucking operation with a high score will always get a red light from their weigh station bypass service provider, forcing them to pull in?**

Drew: It's important to understand that just because somebody has a high ISS score, it is not a guarantee they'll get pulled in. It means that they are prioritized to get pulled in. So if you've got a line of trucks at the scale backing up onto the highway, inspectors have the option to wave through somebody with a high ISS score. They won't automatically inspect them. However, people need to remember, for example, if two trucks are at the scale and one truck has an ISS score of 85, and the other truck has an ISS score of 25, if an officer is going to conduct

an inspection he's probably going to do it on the truck with 85 not 25. Now, that officer may not conduct an inspection for whatever reason. It's not guaranteed that an inspection will occur, but all things being equal he's more likely to pick the truck with the higher ISS score.

**Evan: And in that same vein, if someone has a low ISS score, does that automatically mean they are going to get a bypass, or are they subject to other reasons an officer might have for pulling a truck in?**

Drew: You are always subject to the officer's discretion. That's a guarantee. So if you have an ISS of 16, the officer could still decide to do an inspection. There's always a random element and this varies by state. And this is what we at HELP and PrePass feel is a huge benefit and advantage for our customers, because we work with these states. We adhere very strictly to the standards mandated by individual states for bypassing. For instance, in California, if your ISS is over 75, you cannot bypass, period. That's not the case in other states.

**Evan: You mentioned the levels are different in various states. For instance, you said that in California the maximum ISS score for pull in is 75. Does that mean it's automatic they are going to get pulled into a weigh station?**

Drew: Assuming that the scale is open, then yes, you need to pull in. However, that doesn't mean that you are going to get an inspection. They still may wave you through. Inspections are often based upon the level of manpower available at the inspection facility itself, so it's unlikely they'll require every truck to stop. So pulling in is the first event and then whether or not they retain you for further scrutiny and actually do an inspection, that's another event or another decision that gets made.

**Evan: Based on what I am hearing from you, it seems there's little consistency among the states as to what level of ISS score is required to get prioritized for an inspection, correct?**

Drew: That is exactly correct. Just like we see variances in enforcement activities in states, we know, anecdotally, that Indiana tends to focus more on speeding, Oregon is more likely to focus on hours of service, and in Texas, it's lights. We can see the patterns of priorities in each state when we look closely at the data. ISS is a Federal program to prioritize motor carriers, but at the end of the day, the individual states are responsible for enforcement of

the laws on their roads. So they have the final say in determining who gets inspected and who does not.

**Evan: Are there tools or data fleets can use to monitor and help improve their ISS scores?**

Drew: So, there's two questions here. First, monitoring in and of itself is available to any motor carrier through the FMCSA portal. Every motor carrier can, and should, be accessing their portal account which is where they'll find their current ISS score.

The second question is the real challenge, how does a carrier improve their score?

Given sufficient resources, any carrier has the ability to access the raw data from the Safety Measurement System (SMS) and begin manipulating that data such that answers will eventually be revealed over time. However, this requires not only the ability to manipulate the data, but a pretty solid understanding of the CSA and ISS methodologies.

In early 2017, HELP Inc., provider of PrePass, released the InfoRM™ safety data system. With InfoRM, we've taken our understanding of the data and methodologies and placed heavy emphasis on data visualization. At the end of the day ISS and CSA is all about driver behavior. What that means is that the carrier needs answers to four basic questions: who, what, when and where. The choice then becomes do they want to search for those answers in a very large and cumbersome data set or do they want those answers presented to them in a manner that's easy to understand and communicate to their stakeholders.

Keep in mind that CSA and ISS are components of a comprehensive approach to safety. Are they important? Absolutely, critical even. However, true safety at a motor carrier is cultural and that demands clear, timely, and effective communication across the entire organization. We feel strongly that InfoRM helps support a true culture of safety. 🚛



*Drew Anderson is the director of carrier relations at PrePass, the leading weigh station bypass and toll payment system in the United States. For more information on ISS scores and PrePass, call (800) 773-7277 or visit [www.prepass.com](http://www.prepass.com).*