

1 **THE IMPACT OF NON-PREVENTABLE CRASHES ON COMPLIANCE, SAFETY,**
2 **ACCOUNTABILITY SCORES**

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1
2 **ABSTRACT**
3 The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration’s (FMCSA’s) Compliance, Safety,
4 Accountability (CSA) program identifies high risk motor carriers using crash and inspection data
5 in seven Behavioral Analysis and Safety Improvement Categories (BASICS). The Crash
6 Indicator BASIC (“Crash BASIC”) uses *all* prior crash involvement to evaluate carrier safety; no
7 differentiation is made between crashes which could have been prevented by the actions of the
8 driver and/or motor carrier and those which were non-preventable. As a result, the Crash BASIC
9 may not accurately represent a carrier’s safety performance.

10 This case study approach models the impact of excluding non-preventable crashes from
11 the Crash BASIC calculation by mapping the crash records of 15 motor carriers to the Motor
12 Carrier Information Management System (MCMIS), then removing five non-preventable crash
13 types from the calculation of the Crash BASIC. Non-preventable crashes comprised 61 percent
14 of the 15 carriers’ crash records, the five identified crash types comprise only a small number of
15 these crashes. The comparison of the FMCSA-generated Crash BASIC with the “adjusted” Crash
16 BASIC that excludes the five crash types shows that removing certain non-preventable crashes
17 impacts carrier measures significantly, shifts of the relative ranking for the 14 motor carriers in
18 the sample in the same peer group. The five crash types represent a small proportion of the
19 carriers’ non-preventable crashes; a broader incorporation of non-preventable crashes would
20 therefore result in even more significant changes to carrier Crash BASIC measures and relative
21 rankings.

1 **BACKGROUND**

2 In 2010, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) replaced its previous safety
3 program, Safety Status Measurement System (SafeStat), with the newly developed Compliance,
4 Safety, Accountability (CSA) program. CSA was intended to be a more targeted, robust system
5 for identifying high-risk carriers and prioritizing carriers for intervention. While many in the
6 trucking industry have found CSA to be an improvement over SafeStat, there are concerns about
7 CSA's accuracy in predicting crash risk, among other issues. Under CSA, both carriers and
8 drivers receive safety scores across seven Behavioral Analysis and Safety Improvement
9 Categories (BASICS) (1).

10 To address some of these concerns, FMCSA has made a number of changes to CSA
11 since its debut in 2010. Some of the changes included adjusting violation severity weights,
12 reorganizing two of the BASICS, and clarifying certain data inputs (2). Currently, FMCSA is
13 proposing more changes to the CSA program, including abandoning percentile rankings in favor
14 of absolute intervention thresholds, only assessing the Crash Indicator BASIC ("Crash BASIC")
15 during investigations, limiting the scope of the Crash BASIC to preventable crashes, and
16 reducing the three-tiered safety fitness classification system to only a single determination –
17 "unfit." (3) Another recent CSA development includes FMCSA's proposal for a demonstration
18 program to assign preventability determinations to certain crash types (4).

19 **INTRODUCTION**

21 A number of studies have investigated the relationship between crash risk and carriers identified
22 as high risk by the CSA program. The first of these studies used linear models to assess the
23 statistical validity of predicting crash risk using SMS data, finding no relationship (5, 6, 7).
24 However, the use of linear models for analyzing the relationship between SMS and crash data
25 violates the linear model assumption of a normal distribution of error terms. The American
26 Transportation Research Institute (ATRI) analyzed the relationship between SMS and crash data
27 with the negative binomial model, a statistical model better suited to overdispersed count data
28 (8). ATRI's analysis revealed that both the Driver Fitness and Controlled Substances/Alcohol
29 BASICS had inverse relationships to crash risk. In addition, the research indicated that rating
30 carrier safety performance by the cumulative number of alerts across BASICS could better
31 identify high risk carriers than the percentile metrics currently used. Currently, BASIC alerts are
32 based on a carrier exceeding a specific percentile threshold. ATRI also investigated the impact
33 that enforcement disparities across the lower 48 states had on carrier BASIC scores (9). This
34 study confirmed corroborated research findings that certain states issue violations at rates
35 considerably higher than national averages (5, 7). Furthermore, the research documented that
36 carrier BASIC scores were affected by disparate enforcement activities across the United States.

37 Similarly, states exhibit disparities in reporting crashes to FMCSA's MCMIS. The
38 University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute (UMTRI) has investigated the
39 disparate crash reporting rates of many states, and their most recent investigations show that
40 crash reporting rates to MCMIS are highly inconsistent across states. The UMTRI analyses of
41 2010 MCMIS data for Delaware, New Jersey, and Utah revealed MCMIS reporting rates of 71.6
42 percent, 75.3 percent and 71.4 percent respectively (10, 11, 12). In addition to data integrity
43 issues, the statistical validity of the SMS has been called into question.

44 The Government Accountability Office's (GAO) review of the CSA program concluded
45 that most violations are so rare that validating the relationship between crash risk and violations
46 is difficult (13). Additionally, the GAO found that most carriers do not have sufficient safety
47 performance information to make reliable comparisons within carrier peer groups.

1 These studies exposed general issues within the SMS; however incorporating all crashes
2 in the Crash Indicator BASIC calculation – regardless of preventability – warrants further
3 examination. FMCSA defines a *preventable crash* as a “crash that involved a commercial motor
4 vehicle, and that could have been averted but for an act, or failure to act, by the motor carrier or
5 the [truck] driver.” (14)

6 7 **Crash Indicator BASIC**

8 The Crash BASIC evaluates a carrier’s crash involvement history for the previous 24 months (1).
9 Only state-reported crashes coded as “Department of Transportation (DOT) reportable,” meaning
10 the crash involves at least one fatality, one injury where an individual is taken to a medical
11 facility for treatment, or a vehicle is towed due to damages resulting from the crash, are assessed
12 in the Crash BASIC (15). Under the current SMS methodology all DOT-reportable crashes
13 count against a carrier regardless of preventability determinations. Despite the Crash BASIC
14 measure being restricted from the public, all DOT-reportable crashes that are used to calculate a
15 carrier’s Crash BASIC measure are available to the public.

16 Many industry stakeholders have noted that not including a preventability determination
17 in the BASIC formula may generate misleading conclusions about a truck driver’s or a carrier’s
18 actual safety performance (16). For example, if a legally parked commercial motor vehicle
19 (CMV) is struck by another vehicle and is classified as a DOT-reportable crash, this negatively
20 impacts a carrier’s Crash BASIC measure. In this scenario, neither the driver of the CMV nor
21 the carrier could have prevented the crash, yet the crash creates the perception that the carrier is
22 less safe. According to FMCSA’s Crash BASIC factsheet, “carriers should be aware that crashes
23 in the previous 24 months adversely affect carriers’ SMS results and *only not having* crashes will
24 improve carriers’ percentile ranking.”(17)

25 Some safety advocates support the inclusion of all crashes, regardless of preventability,
26 due to the correlation between past crashes and future crash risk (16). However, this effect is
27 likely due to the statistical strength of the correlation between historical preventable crashes and
28 future preventable crash risk; removing non-preventable crashes from the all-crash database
29 would ostensibly elucidate this hypothesis. So while the Crash BASIC has a correlation to future
30 crash involvement, it does not distinguish between causation and involvement (18). Failing to
31 account for the difference between involvement and causation may mask the statistical strength
32 that non-preventable crashes likely have on future crash risk, and present an inaccurate
33 representation of driver and carrier safety.

34 CSA scores can directly influence the economic viability of motor carriers (19, 20).
35 Therefore, an exposure adjustment should be included in the Crash BASIC that acknowledges
36 the role of the driver in the crash. Removing non-preventable crashes from the Crash BASIC
37 would serve as an exposure adjustment, by removing all crashes where involvement was the
38 result of exposure to an unsafe but non-preventable externality. Thus the change would then
39 better align Crash BASIC calculations with FMCSA’s mandate to identify carriers and truck
40 drivers that pose the greatest risk to public safety (21).

41 Despite Crash BASIC scores being restricted from the public, they can still impact carriers
42 and drivers significantly (5). Potential areas of impact include:

43 • Economic harm. Shippers can, and often do, require the disclosure of Crash BASIC
44 measures and percentiles to assess the safety of a carrier (19,22). All things being equal, carriers
45 with a “bad” Crash BASIC score may be less likely to receive freight contracts than a “safer”
46 carrier (20). Commercial drivers with non-preventable crashes on their record may experience
47 issues – with finding employment – as most data sources used for employment screening

1 (insurance loss data; Pre-Employment Screening Program [PSP] reports) do not differentiate
2 preventable crashes from non-preventable crashes.

- 3 • Higher insurance costs. It is well understood that carrier BASIC scores are used as
4 actuarial inputs for insurance risk assessments and determinations of premium levels.
- 5 • Legal consequences. Plaintiff attorneys may cite BASIC scores in legal proceedings, as
6 an indicator of negligence and culpability.
- 7 • Lost productivity from more frequent inspections. The Inspection Selection System
8 (ISS), a tool for selecting CMVs to inspect, is influenced by BASIC scores (23).

9
10 The influence that BASIC scores have on the productivity and viability of carrier make it
11 paramount for the measures to accurately reflect a carrier and commercial driver safety
12 performance.

13 14 **Crash Preventability Research**

15 In 2012, FMCSA responded to industry concerns surrounding crash preventability
16 determinations by conducting a crash weighting research study (16). In the initial phase of its
17 study, FMCSA conducted a police accident report (PAR) coding test. Two researchers
18 independently coded 1,221 crash records to determine the feasibility of assigning crash
19 preventability determinations based solely on PARs. Results from this analysis indicated that the
20 coders reached 93.2 percent agreement when assigning responsibility (24). These results suggest
21 that consensus is often possible when determining which party caused a crash.

22 Subsequent study phases evaluated whether PAR data are adequately reliable and
23 sufficient across the entire United States to be used to determine if the truck driver was
24 responsible for the crash (by cross-referencing PARs with records that are included in the
25 Fatality Analysis Reporting System [FARS] and the National Motor Vehicle Crash Causation
26 Study [NMVCCS]) (25). The analysis of PAR data found that 91 percent of the crashes
27 examined had sufficient information to determine if a CMV was involved in the crash, if the
28 CMV was regulated by FMCSA and if the crash was DOT-reportable. Of the PARs meeting
29 these criteria, 61 percent had critical reasons that were not attributed to the CMV driver. The
30 reliability of PARs was tested by comparing them to FARS records. There were significant
31 inconsistencies between PAR and FARS data for areas critical to determining culpability; 82
32 percent of the PARs were missing car- or truck-driver contributing factors and 47.5 percent of the
33 PARs were missing the first harmful event. Consistency between PARs and NMVCCS was
34 better; with 90 percent of the researcher-examined crashes having critical reason determinations
35 that matched.

36 In 2015, FMCSA released the final Crash Weighting Analysis report, which attempted to
37 quantify the effect that including preventability determinations in the Crash BASIC would have
38 on predicting future crash risk. FMCSA concluded that including preventability determinations
39 did not significantly improve the predictive power of the Crash BASIC measure (25). The
40 methodology used in the FMCSA report, called the effectiveness test, compares the future crash
41 rates of carriers prioritized for intervention with a baseline crash rate (the crash rate of carriers
42 prioritized for intervention under the current methodology)(26). However, using all future
43 crashes (not just preventable crashes) to assess the impact of including preventability
44 determinations in the Crash BASIC fails to address whether using only preventable crashes
45 identifies the carriers most likely to *cause* crashes in the future.

46 Additionally, FMCSA estimated that identifying and incorporating at-fault
47 determinations to the Crash BASIC would cost between \$3.9 and \$11.2 million annually, with an

1 initial startup cost of \$1.1 million dollars (25). The variation in yearly cost estimates results
2 from different projections of appeal rates, between 10 percent and 50 percent. However, these
3 cost projections may be overinflated due to the fact that FMCSA assumes crash responsibility
4 determinations would be made by compiling PARs from states, then reviewing PARs to make
5 crash responsibility determinations. Some industry stakeholders suggest that FMCSA does not
6 need to bear all responsibility for the process of determining crash preventability as state
7 organizations that already investigate crash causes and report crashes to MCMIS could add
8 reporting preventability determinations to the data reported to MCMIS (27).

9 FMCSA's Crash Weighting Report examines the costs FMCSA would incur by
10 assigning crash preventability, but fails to assess the cost to industry stakeholders by not
11 incorporating preventability into the Crash BASIC calculation.

12 **METHODOLOGY**

13 **Assigning Crash Preventability**

14
15 The relationship between crash risk and numerous environmental and behavioral factors –
16 including fatigue, driver health, and personality attributes – have been researched extensively
17 (28, 29, 30, 31, 32). The purpose here is to examine the impact of non-preventable crashes on
18 carrier Crash BASIC measures. As a baseline analysis, a conservative approach was taken in the
19 selection and analysis of crash causes. Five primary non-preventable crash causes were selected
20 for this analysis:

- 21 • Truck collided with animal in roadway,
- 22 • Other driver hits legally parked truck,
- 23 • Other driver ran red light or stop sign and hit truck,
- 24 • Other driver was under the influence of drugs or alcohol and hit truck, or,
- 25 • Truck-assisted suicide by pedestrian.

26 **Data Request Form**

27
28 Crash BASIC percentile scores are restricted to the public and MCMIS does not include crash
29 causes or preventability determinations, so ATRI employed a carrier case study approach. ATRI
30 researchers developed a data request form which solicited from carriers their FMCSA-generated
31 data on their Crash BASIC. This data included percentile score, measure, safety event group and
32 segment as provided by FMCSA on 9/26/2014 (1). In addition, ATRI requested a detailed carrier
33 crash history for the 24-month time period between September 2012 and September 2014.
34 Among the crash record variables requested were the number of fatalities, injuries and vehicles
35 towed, if hazardous materials were released, the primary crash cause and if the crash was coded
36 as preventable according to FMCSA's definition (14,33).

37 **Mapping Carrier Records to MCMIS**

38
39 After carrier records were received, crashes that fell into one of the 5 "primary cause" bins were
40 isolated and matched with crashes in the carrier's MCMIS file.

41 The differences between the carrier-provided crash data and MCMIS data were
42 significant. As a result of these differences, the carrier-provided data was used to identify which
43 crashes could be attributed to at least one of the five primary cause bins, and the MCMIS data
44 was used to calculate Crash BASIC measures and to validate the five-bin, non-preventable
45 crashes represented in the MCMIS dataset.

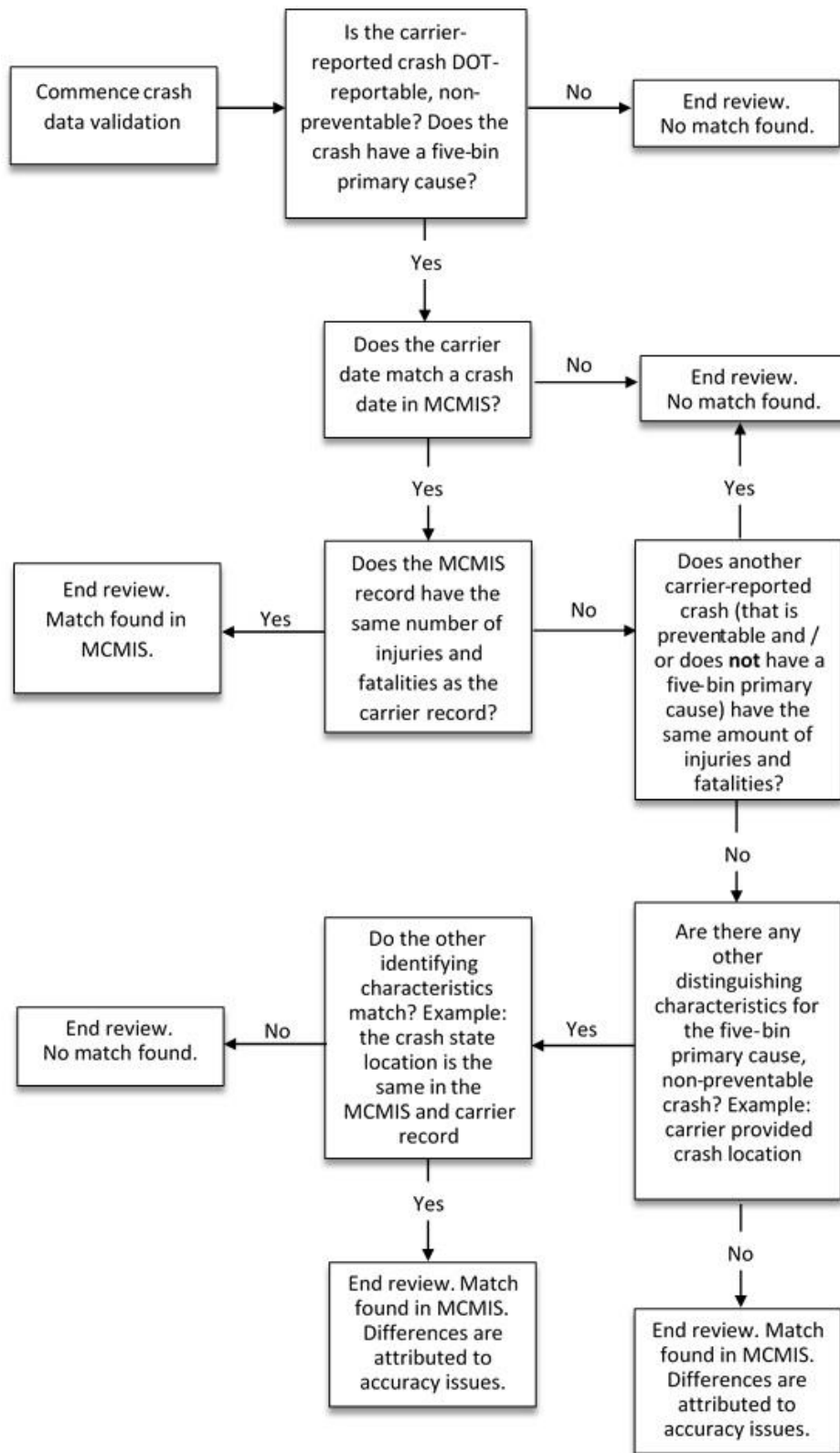
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1 *Explanations for Variance*

2 There are a multitude of explanations for the variation between the two sources. One
3 explanation is the variation present in state accident reporting procedures. For example, not all
4 states use the same definition of injury as FMCSA. Varying definitions among states influence
5 whether states report applicable injuries to FMCSA. This issue is highlighted in UMTRI's
6 studies on MCMIS reporting rates. For example, the Colorado accident report form uses the
7 KABCN scale – with K being fatal injury, A being incapacitating, B as non-incapacitating but
8 evident, C being complaint of injury, and N being no injury – to classify the severity of an injury
9 but does not identify if individuals were transported for medical treatment (34). Conversely,
10 FMCSA defines an injury as “bodily injury to a person who, as a result of the injury,
11 immediately receives medical treatment away from the scene of the accident.”(15) The
12 inconsistency between these two definitions of injury likely results in crashes that do not meet
13 FMCSA's criteria to be reported to MCMIS.

14 Additionally, as demonstrated by numerous UMTRI reports, reporting rates to MCMIS
15 vary by state.

16 Therefore, matching crash records requires some tolerance for ambiguity. To address
17 the differences between the data sources, severity weights from MCMIS were used for Crash
18 BASIC measure calculations. The process for matching crashes from the carrier file to MCMIS
19 is described in Figure 1.



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FIGURE 1 Process for Matching Carrier and MCMIS Records

1 **Crash Basic Calculation**

2 First, carrier Crash BASIC calculations were corroborated by replicating the carrier's original,
3 FMCSA-provided Crash BASIC measure. Next, crashes that were coded as non-preventable and
4 had a genesis in one of the five primary cause bins were removed from the Crash BASIC
5 calculation. As a final step, the carrier Crash BASIC was recalculated without the
6 aforementioned crashes.

7

8 **RESULTS**

9

10 **Demographics**

11 Seventeen carriers responded to the Crash BASIC data request. Of the 17 carriers, 15 had
12 sufficient information in their crash records to assign clear preventability and primary crash
13 cause determinations. Of these 15 carriers, the majority (60%) were Truckload (Table 1). Most
14 carriers reported that their fleet's average length of haul is 100 to 499 miles (40%) or 500 to 999
15 miles (40%) per trip (Table 2).

16

TABLE 1 Primary Industry Sector

Business	Percent
Truckload	60.0%
Less-Than-Truckload	20.0%
Flatbed	6.7%
Tanker	6.7%
Other	6.7%

17

18 **TABLE 2 Average Length of Haul**

19

Average Length of Haul	Percent
Local (less than 100 miles per trip)	0.0%
Regional (100-499 miles per trip)	40.0%
Inter-Regional (500-999 miles per trip)	40.0%
Long Haul (1,000 or more miles per trip)	13.3%
No Response	6.7%

20

21 As displayed in Table 3, the smallest participating fleets had between 501 and 1,000 power units
22 (13.3%), while the largest fleets had over 5,000 power units (26.7%). The distribution of fleet
23 size in this sample is not representative of the industry at large, of which 93 percent of fleets
24 have less than 20 power units (PU) (13). The sample's skew toward larger carriers is beneficial
25 in that data insufficiency issues associated with small carriers should not influence the present
26 analysis. The GAO's recommended standards for data sufficiency were met by every carrier
27 who participated in this study and the resulting Crash BASIC measures are more precise for the
28 test population group than the BASIC measures of smaller carriers with fewer DOT-reportable
29 crashes.

30

31

1 **TABLE 3 Fleet Size**

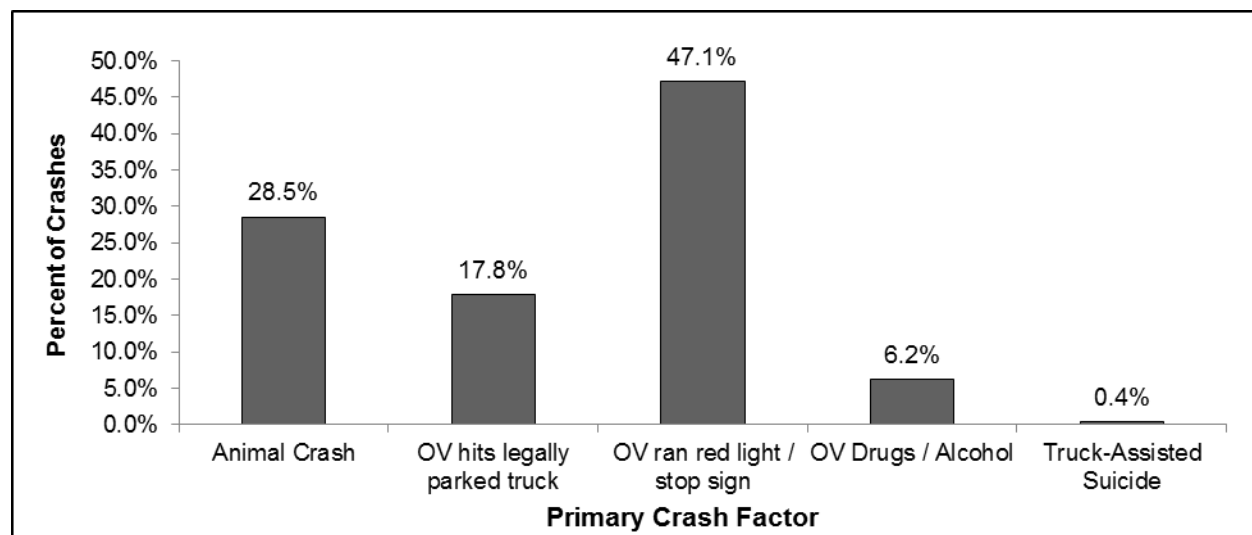
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Power Units	Percent
5,001+	26.7%
1,001-5,000	60.0%
501-1,000	13.3%
251-500	0.0%

3

4 **Distribution of Primary Crash Causes**

5 As noted, researchers identified five primary crash causes that could be removed from the
 6 calculation of a carrier's Crash BASIC measure based on the FMCSA definition of non-
 7 preventable. The carriers in the sample had 241 crashes coded as non-preventable, with a
 8 genesis in at least one of the five crash cause bins. As displayed in Figure 2, crashes where the
 9 other vehicle (OV) ran a red light or stop sign accounted for the largest percentage (47.1%) of
 10 non-preventable crashes removed from a carrier's Crash BASIC measure, followed animal
 11 crashes (28.5%).



13

14

15 **FIGURE 2 Distribution of Crashes Removed from Carrier Records**

16

17 Of the DOT-reportable crashes in carrier records, the crashes associated with ATRI's five
 18 primary cause bins comprised a relatively small proportion of the total non-preventable crashes
 19 reported by carriers (Figure 3). For the 15 carriers, crashes associated with the five primary
 20 cause bins comprised only 8.9 percent of the carriers' total crash record database. Non-
 21 preventable crashes as a whole accounted for 61.0 percent of the carriers' total crash record
 22 database. The varied preventability composition of crashes across the 15 carriers in this sample
 23 suggests the incorporating preventability determinations into Crash BASIC calculations would
 24 not impact all carriers equally.

25

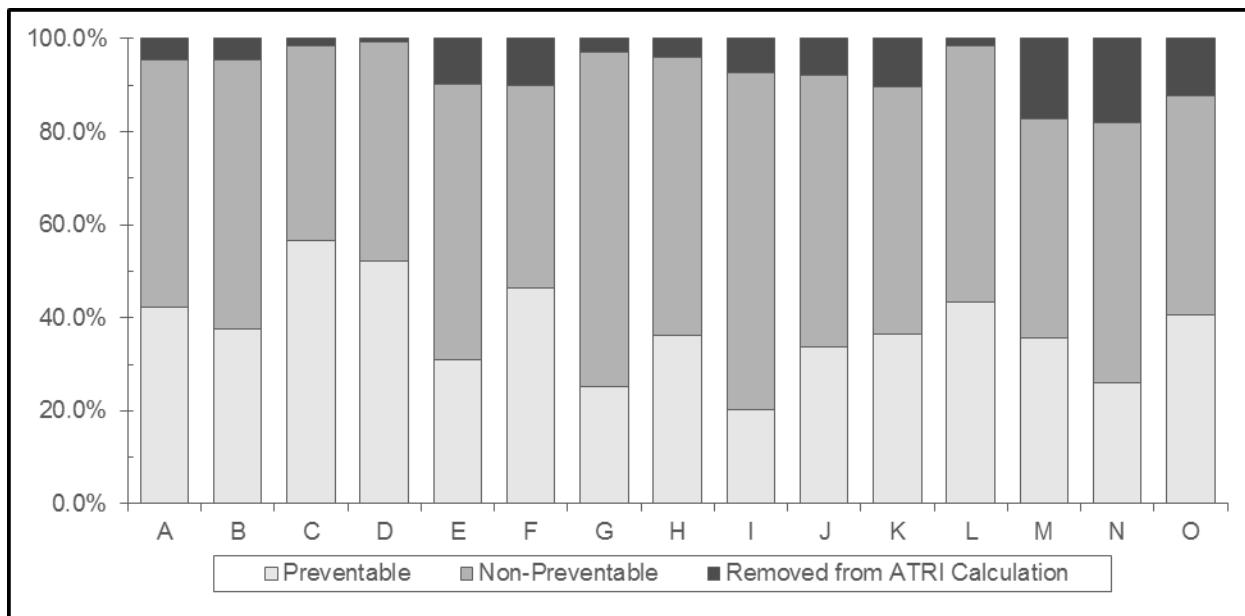


FIGURE 3 Carrier Crash Preventability Distribution

Percent Change in Carrier Crash BASIC Measure

The final step was recalculating a new Crash BASIC measure, by removing the MCMIS records for carrier crashes residing in the five primary cause bins. As shown in Figure 4, Carrier C experienced no decrease in their Crash BASIC measure (0.0%), while Carrier M experienced the largest percentage decrease in their Crash BASIC measure (14.2%). On average, Crash BASIC measures decreased by 5.3 percent.

The five primary cause crashes comprised a small proportion of each carrier’s non-preventable crashes, so the changes in Crash BASIC measures are a very conservative estimate of the impact that non-preventable crashes have on a carrier’s Crash BASIC measure.

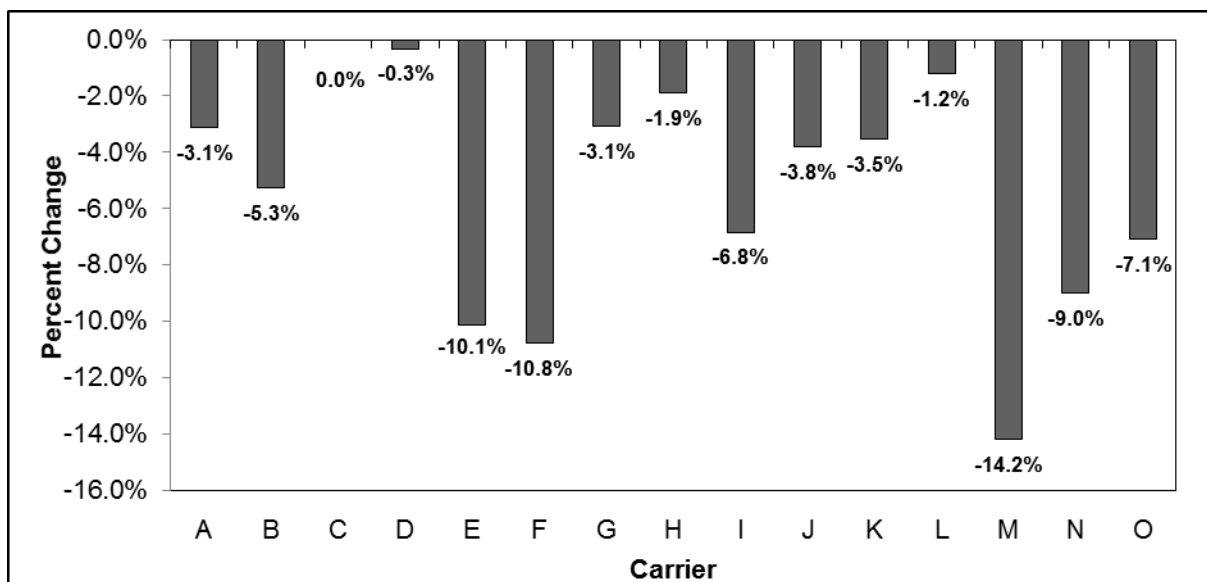


FIGURE 4 Percent Change in Carrier Crash BASIC Measure

1 The carrier-reported Crash BASIC measure and percentile scores suggest that even small
 2 changes in a carrier's measure could significantly impact the carrier's percentile score. For
 3 example, two carriers reported identical FMCSA Crash BASIC measures of .16 on September
 4 26, 2014, yet there was an 11 percentage point difference between the carriers' percentile scores;
 5 this phenomenon was seen across multiple instances where identical measures generated
 6 different rankings. Therefore, even what ostensibly should be a small change in a carrier's Crash
 7 BASIC measure could result in a large impact on the percentile ranking of a carrier.

8 Since carrier Crash BASIC measures and percentile scores are restricted from the
 9 public, modeling the impact of the change in Crash BASIC measures on percentile scores was
 10 not possible, as that would require access to the entire peer grouping for each carrier. Since all
 11 carriers in this sample (except for Carrier O) were in the same peer group, the relative ranking of
 12 carriers' Crash BASICs can be compared in a manner similar to FMCSA's method of assigning
 13 percentile scores. The ranking of carriers from FMCSA-provided and adjusted Crash BASIC
 14 measures are shown in Table 4. Like FMCSA's percentile scoring, a lower value indicates better
 15 performance, while a higher value indicates worse performance. For simplicity, the rankings
 16 range from one to 14. Despite the relatively small changes to the carriers' Crash BASIC
 17 measures, the relative ranking of most carriers did change. Four carriers experienced no change
 18 in rank, five carriers' relative rank worsened, and the remaining five carriers' relative ranks
 19 improved.
 20

Carrier	C	D	M	J	F	A	N	K	I	H	L	B	G	E
FMCSA Rank	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Recalculated Rank	2	5	1	4	3	7	6	9	8	10	12	11	13	14
Change in Rank	-	-	+	0	+	-	+	-	+	0	-	+	0	0

21
 22 **TABLE 4 Changes in Rank**

23
 24 **CONCLUSION**

25 The objective of this study was to model the impact of removing non-preventable crashes from a
 26 carrier's Crash BASIC measure. These results demonstrate that even a conservative approach to
 27 defining and assessing preventability can impact a carrier's Crash BASIC measure significantly.
 28 Additionally, this analysis found:

29 • Non-preventable crashes comprise the majority of the sample. Therefore, a broader
 30 definition of preventability than the five primary-cause bin approach used in this report, would
 31 likely result in dramatic changes to Crash BASIC measures.

32 • Small differences in Crash BASIC measures result in significantly different percentile
 33 rankings, with this sample having a maximum range of 11 percentage points for the same
 34 FMCSA-provided score.

35 • The composition of preventable and non-preventable crashes varies across carriers. A
 36 Crash BASIC that only considers preventable crashes would affect carriers differently.

- 1 • Small changes in Crash BASIC measures result in significant changes to Crash BASIC
- 2 percentile rankings, given the range of percentile rankings resulting from a single FMCSA-
- 3 provided score and the varied composition of preventable and non-preventable crashes across
- 4 carriers.
- 5 • Assigning preventability could also rectify issues beyond the Crash BASIC, such as
- 6 carrier costs, insurance premiums and driver safety records.

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