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## HANDS OFF

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### CSA'S DATA TRAIL UPDATE

Where enforcement is tight and light **40**

**HOW FAST**  
is too fast?  
fast? **4**



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**SUPER TRUCK**  
Cruising into the future **26**

**SEVERE SERVICE**  
Cat, Pete, Mack ... and Tonka!  
**52**



**SURVIVING**  
food poisoning **96**



# Decreasing inspections

**Overall inspections fell in 2014 as industry and law enforcement stepped up the push to revamp the CSA program.**

**Meanwhile, state enforcement intensity continues to vary widely, with violations continuing to tilt toward on-highway infractions and hours.**

**BY TODD DILLS**

**T**ruck inspection numbers rose nearly 20 percent between 2011 and 2013, the early years of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's Compliance, Safety, Accountability program. Then, due to various factors, that total fell by close to 10 percent last year.

Large regional disparities in the behavior of state truck enforcement departments that do the inspections and write the violations have continued, though some states have changed their inspection and violation priorities.

These changes are highlighted in *Overdrive's* latest update to its ongoing CSA's Data Trail analysis. In addition to what's shown in these pages, there is

much more detail at [OverdriveOnline.com/CSA](http://OverdriveOnline.com/CSA).

One possible factor in the nationwide decline in inspections is the growing movement against CSA within the industry and even some areas of law enforcement. *Overdrive* readers are no exception.

When they were asked in spring 2014 whether public CSA Safety Measurement System category "scores" should be pulled from public view, "yes" answers accounted for 68 percent of responses. Since then, there have been widespread investigations, in venues ranging from these pages to Congress, of the program's inequities. In reader polling this spring, more than 80 percent of readers now say "yes" to pulling back the program's reins.

## CSA's DATA TRAIL

The CSA series will continue next month with an examination of California, the first of our standout state reports. For further detail on state rankings regarding inspections and violations, visit [OverdriveOnline.com/CSA](http://OverdriveOnline.com/CSA).

Todd Dills

"I think there's a lot of legitimacy to the movement until these scores are fixed," said Dan Murray, American Transportation Research Institute vice president. Speaking in April at the Truckload Carriers Association's Safety & Security Division meeting, Murray said that as a result of industry pressure, he believes a "sea change" is coming in two to three years so that CSA "somehow becomes useful to industry."

Chief among the program's problems today are the percentile-ranking, nationally comparative nature of the CSA SMS' categories of measurement and the fact that the rankings/scores are available publicly. The problems are due in part to the widely diverging tactics and approaches to inspection selection and other enforcement at the state and local levels.

As Murray noted, results of ATRI's relatively recent shipper survey on CSA showed that 96 percent of shippers "were checking existing carrier accounts' scores, and 100 percent were checking prospective accounts."

Since its introduction in March, not much seems to have happened with H.R. 1371, the House bill that would require a concerted study and revamp

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# DECREASING INSPECTIONS



Todd Dills

Georgia DPS has put 150 of these TruCam Lidar radar guns into service, useful for more than measuring speed. With photo, video and GPS capabilities to document and provide solid evidence, officers say they're a boon to making the notorious "following too close" charge stick in court.

of the program, including pulling SMS percentile rankings/scores from public view. Attempts to move similar language into drafts of the highway reauthorization may surface again during the next round of talks. Nonetheless, CSA's irregularities remain a topic of large concern.

Though inspections fell in 2014, the intensity spread among state en-

forcement departments continued to range widely. Measured by inspections conducted per lane-mile of National Highway System roadway, it was as high as 17 in Maryland and as low as one in Vermont. Also extremely divergent among states are violation profiles.

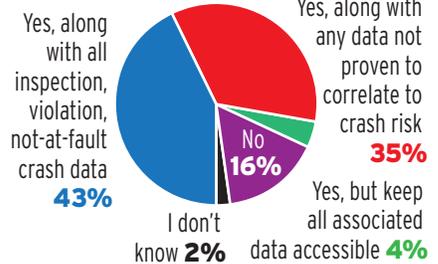
If there's any trend, it's "definitely a movement to more moving and hours of service violations," says Steve Keppler, Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance executive director.

## GEORGIA

Among top-10 enforcement-intense states with the biggest declines in inspections was Georgia. The state dialed back on overall inspections from 81,183 in 2013 to 69,188 in 2014, a 15 percent decline. The reason? Continuing manpower issues, says Capt. Jeremy Vickery of the Georgia Department of Public Safety's Atlanta headquarters.

From a high of about 300 dedicated State Patrol troopers involved in commercial vehicle enforcement, the state now has 242 officers. "The goal is to get

## Should carriers' CSA SMS scores/rankings be removed from public view?



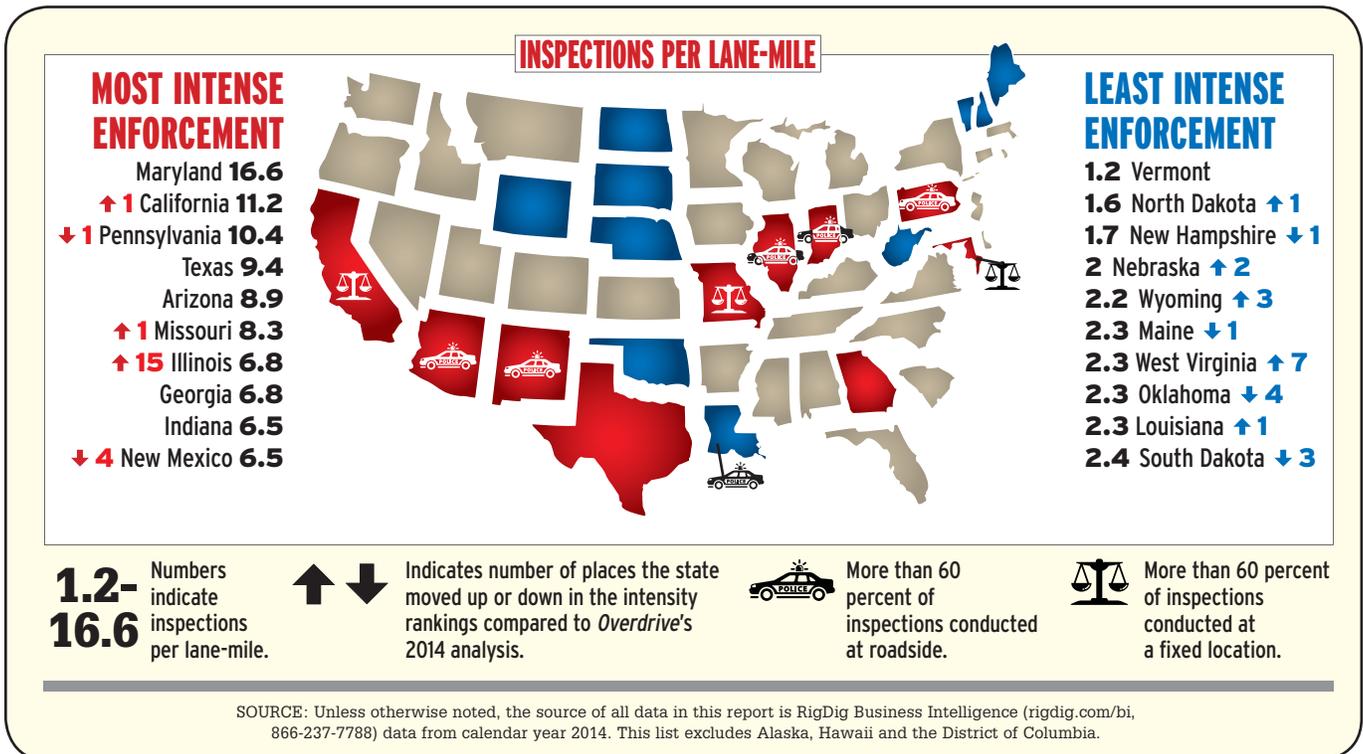
OverdriveOnline.com poll

back to 300 by 2017," Vickery says.

As in other budget-hampered areas across the nation, Georgia is focusing on doing more with less. Part of that solution is relying on technology.

The department has put 150 TruCam Lidar guns in operation. The speed-radar guns also have photo, video and GPS capabilities to provide solid evidence of vehicles following too closely.

Vickery touts the state's GTACT program, its version of FMCSA's national



## DECREASING INSPECTIONS

Ticketing Aggressive Cars and Trucks effort. With the TruCams in place, "if you can see that video [of a car] 0.2 seconds off the truck's bumper," Vickery says, or vice versa, the notoriously fuzzy offense has a much better chance of sticking in court. With video capability, speeding offenses proceed likewise.

Georgia's also one of 11 states that has a performance-based brake tester, a device that measures overall and individual-axle brake performance. North Georgia-based Lt. Lee Robertson says the PBBT is used occasionally by a mobile unit in hilly country with a predominance of log trucks and other units "where they are really using those brakes a lot." It was used at an I-85 scale in Lavonia, Ga., during an unannounced May 6 national brake check blitz.

Such units are proving to be a boon for finding brake problems, particularly

## WIRELESS INSPECTIONS MEET RESISTANCE

The Wireless Roadside Inspection program from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration is far from prime time, but with a multistate field operational test set to begin late this year, it's garnered enough attention that some members of Congress have asked a critical question: Is it worth it?

In addition to a block on funding insurance-hike work and extension of the restart change rollback, an item halting funding to the WRI research and design effort also was included in the U.S. Department of Transportation funding bill that moved out of committee in May.

The block would prohibit appropriations funding contingent on a requirement that DOT's leadership report "to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations that such program does not conflict with



Todd Dills

Lt. Lee Robertson of the Georgia State Patrol says that Wireless Roadside Inspector contractor Oak Ridge National Laboratory has been in conversation with his state, among others, about participating in WRI's field operational test.

existing non-Federal electronic screening systems," the language of the item says.

In an online seminar in May, Steve

(Continued on Page 77)

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## DECREASING INSPECTIONS

in disc-brake systems where a lot of the components are encased and not easily inspected visually, says Keppler. “Brakes are still the number one issue” nationwide for inspectors.

Brakes also rank high on most states’

violation-priorities lists in *Overdrive’s* analysis. (In Georgia, brake violations trail only lights and hours of service violations.) Brake violations “used to be predominantly related to brake adjustment, but we’re seeing a shift toward

brake-system-component-type violations,” partly due to self-adjusting slack adjusters, Keppler says.

With disc brakes, there’s a longer-term issue. “Most of the components are encased, and some suppliers say you don’t have to maintain them,” Keppler says. “There are some fleets that will do a good job and some that won’t. PBBTs offer another way to look at those braking systems.”

### ILLINOIS

Brakes also rank high, No. 2, in another top-10 inspection-intensity state’s violation priorities. Significant in Illinois’ case, however, is what the violation category’s tied with in the state’s rankings: speeding.

Illinois offers a counterpoint to Georgia’s falling inspection numbers. Between 2012 and 2014, Illinois shifted priorities,

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### ONLINE EXTRAS

• **CSA's Data Trail** – Visit [OverdriveOnline.com/csa](http://OverdriveOnline.com/csa) for updated maps and full 48-state downloads with 2014 rankings for inspection and violation intensity, from moving violations to clean inspections, hours violations and maintenance subcategories for brakes, lights and tires.

• **“How to influence enforcement actions at roadside”** – Search that phrase at [OverdriveOnline.com](http://OverdriveOnline.com) to read inspectors’ and owner-operators’ tips to communicate effectively and make your next stop a non-event. For more on the subject, search “discretion is a big word” for an analysis of how officer discretion plays out in roadside enforcement situations.

• **Podcast: Latest on the SFD rulemaking** – Due later this year, an FMCSA rulemaking will seek to tie inspection/violation data to a carrier’s safety fitness determination. Dave Heller of the Truckload Carriers Association believes the proposal will represent the industry’s best opportunity to speak out broadly on the CSA program. Search “industry with a voice” to hear his address at TCA’s Safety and Security meeting in April.

## DECREASING INSPECTIONS

pouring resources into truck enforcement. It nearly doubled its number of inspections to replace Nevada in the top 10 (measured per lane-mile), jumping 15 places to No. 7.

Rob Dykes, posting on *Overdrive's* Facebook page, pointed to observed increased activity the past year at the improved scale facility eastbound and westbound on I-280 in Moline. "They seem to be open 24/7 with the PrePass turned off," he wrote. "You have to parade through just to get sent to the bypass lane."

Illinois' fixed-location inspections were up by a small margin last year, according to the data. However, the vast majority of its increase is attributable to roadside enforcement. The number of such inspections grew by 60 percent from 2013 to 2014. Hours of service, speeding and improper lane changes all appear in the state's top six violation categories, in addition to equipment/maintenance-related issues.

The first of those categories, hours, was significantly at issue in accidents involving trucks that killed two (and severely injured one) state police officers between November 2012 and January 2014. That created ideal conditions for an increased awareness of truck enforcement throughout the state, says Don Schaefer, Mid-West Truckers Association executive director.

Illinois State Police Master Sgt. Todd Armstrong says stakeholders in truck enforcement convened in the aftermath and refocused enforcement on trucks, accounting for the large inspection increase in 2014. Its 950-odd-member squad comes out of the state's police academies certified for Level 3 credentials inspections, where a threefold increase was seen between 2012 and 2014.

Troopers have emphasized truck inspections particularly on patrol in priority corridors such as the high-traffic region around Chicago (accounting for

nearly half of all inspections), in Metro East around St. Louis, Mo., and in and around Effingham on I-70 and I-57.

In Will County near Chicago, which includes the city of Joliet and a growing number of intermodal facilities, one particular hotspot of activity made waves after the Mid-West group, responding to member complaints, made it known.

The association alleged entrapment by officers working at a weight-restricted culvert crossing where confusing signage provided inadequate warning of the restriction. The officers "know the opportunities," Schaefer says. "The issue with this culvert, which is a simple repair, has been dragging on and on and on."

After the issue "blew up" following a radio spot by Mid-West Associate Director Matt Wells on WBBM-AM in Chicago, it got the state's attention, says Schaefer. "Illinois DOT had said they'd put it on their five-year plan to get it fixed. Now, they say

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# DECREASING INSPECTIONS

they've found the money, and they're going to fix it" as soon as possible.

It's another example of how getting involved in the conversations around eq-

uity and fairness in inspections, violations and citations at levels above the inspector can pay dividends. As Help Inc.'s Steve Vaughn noted in a recent seminar, if

you have a problem that needs a remedy, "I'd recommend you get involved at the headquarters level where you can really affect some change." 

## THE SEVEN-STATE SPEED TRAP

These seven states show speeding among their top six violation priorities. All but Ohio are a top 20 state in *Overdrive's* moving violations intensity rankings.

Trucks are under particular scrutiny while on the highway in these states that have considerable resources devoted to mobile enforcement, so the best way to avoid being placed under the enforcement microscope is to keep off the accelerator.

Of the seven states, the two at the east-west extremes (West Virginia and Nebraska) are far down the rankings in inspection intensity, meaning your odds of getting inspected during a roadside stop there are low. But if you are, the likelihood that speeding was the reason you were stopped is relatively high.

### West Virginia

Inspection intensity rank: **No. 42**

Violations per inspection: **1.1**

Clean inspections – **53%**

#### VIOLATION PRIORITIES

Lights	<b>23.6%</b>
Observed vehicle defects	<b>16.4%</b>
Brakes	<b>9.9%</b>
Tires	<b>6.9%</b>
Hours	<b>6%</b>
Speeding	<b>5.9%</b>

### Ohio

Inspection intensity rank: **No. 26**

Violations per inspection: **1.8**

Clean inspections – **35.5%**

#### VIOLATION PRIORITIES

Lights	<b>33.5%</b>
Brakes	<b>19.8%</b>
Observed vehicle defects	<b>8.5%</b>
Tires	<b>7.8%</b>
Hours	<b>7%</b>
Speeding	<b>3.7%</b>

### Indiana

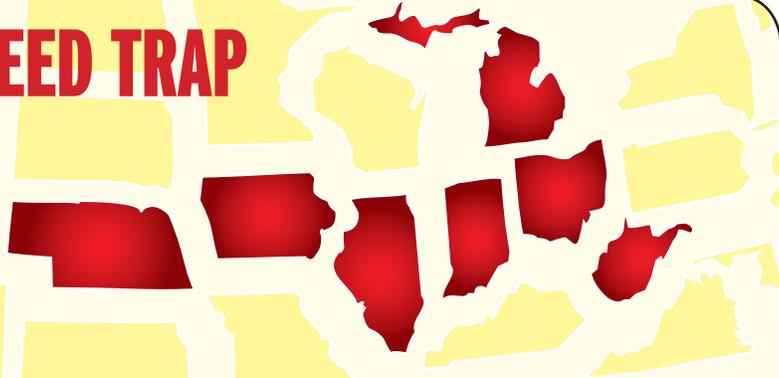
Inspection intensity rank: **No. 9**

Violations per inspection: **1.8**

Clean inspections – **17.3%**

#### VIOLATION PRIORITIES

Hours	<b>18.7%</b>
Speeding	<b>17.4%</b>
Lights	<b>9.3%</b>
Brakes	<b>8.5%</b>



## TOUGHEST STATES FOR MOVING VIOLATIONS OVERALL\*

NATIONAL AVERAGE: 4.6%	North Dakota	<b>10.5%</b>	Iowa	<b>6.9%</b>	
Indiana	<b>24.8%</b>	New Mexico	<b>9.8%</b>	Washington	<b>6.8%</b>
Delaware	<b>22.4%</b>	Massachusetts	<b>9.5%</b>	Alabama	<b>6.3%</b>
Illinois	<b>20.6%</b>	Nebraska	<b>9.4%</b>	Nevada	<b>6.2%</b>
Michigan	<b>13.8%</b>	Vermont	<b>9.1%</b>	Colorado	<b>6%</b>
Idaho	<b>13%</b>	West Virginia	<b>9%</b>		
Tennessee	<b>13%</b>	Wyoming	<b>8.3%</b>		
Oklahoma	<b>12.7%</b>	Louisiana	<b>7.7%</b>		

\*Percentages indicate moving violations' share of all that state's violations

Observed vehicle defects	<b>8.4%</b>
Lack of periodic inspection	<b>3%</b>

Improper lane change **6.6%**

### Michigan

Inspection intensity rank: **No. 13**

Violations per inspection: **1.8**

Clean inspections – **19%**

#### VIOLATION PRIORITIES

Lights	<b>17.4%</b>
Observed vehicle defects	<b>15.6%</b>
Brakes	<b>13.4%</b>
Speeding	<b>9%</b>
Hours	<b>6.2%</b>
Tires	<b>3.1%</b>

### Illinois

Inspection intensity rank: **No. 7**

Violations per inspection: **1.1**

Clean inspections – **47.7%**

#### VIOLATION PRIORITIES

Lights	<b>12.4%</b>
Brakes	<b>11.1%</b>
Speeding	<b>11.1%</b>
Hours	<b>8.9%</b>
Observed vehicle defects	<b>8.2%</b>

### Iowa

Inspection intensity rank: **No. 18**

Violations per inspection: **2.1**

Clean inspections – **23.6%**

#### VIOLATION PRIORITIES

Hours	<b>18.1%</b>
Lights	<b>16.7%</b>
Observed vehicle defects	<b>14.7%</b>
Brakes	<b>9.9%</b>
Lack of periodic inspection	<b>5.2%</b>
Speeding	<b>4.5%</b>

### Nebraska

Inspection intensity rank: **No. 45**

Violations per inspection: **1.5**

Clean inspections – **47.6%**

#### VIOLATION PRIORITIES

Brakes	<b>15.8%</b>
Observed vehicle defects	<b>13.3%</b>
Lights	<b>10.8%</b>
Hours	<b>9.9%</b>
Lack of periodic inspection	<b>7.1%</b>
Speeding	<b>6.3%</b>