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leads in violations per inspection **38**

Randall Reilly

OCTOBER 2014 / \$4.95 U.S. / \$5.95 CAN.



CSA's FALLOUT
STANDOUT STATES Connecticut

This is the second installment in the Standout States series, in which we profile states that stand out for their enforcement intensity, violation-issuing propensity or other reasons. You can access interactive maps charting a raft of enforcement data via *Overdrive's* CSA's Data Trail main site: OverdriveOnline.com/csa.

Finding fault

Last month's evaluation of Maryland and Pennsylvania showed states hard at work checking trucks and drivers. This month, we look at Connecticut, which might get the most bang for its inspection buck with the highest number of violations per inspection on average - and the lowest percentage of clean inspections. **BY TODD DILLS**



Independent owner-operator Joe Bielucki is familiar with what it's like to encounter an officer with

the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles' Commercial Vehicle Safety Division, the lead agency performing the state's truck inspections. Bielucki is based in the state, having carved a niche doing short open-deck hauls where few truckers from elsewhere in the nation want to go.

Though Bielucki's last Level 1 inspection in Connecticut was nearly four years ago, what the inspecting officer told him rings true with more recent trends. In terms of the individual inspection, Con-

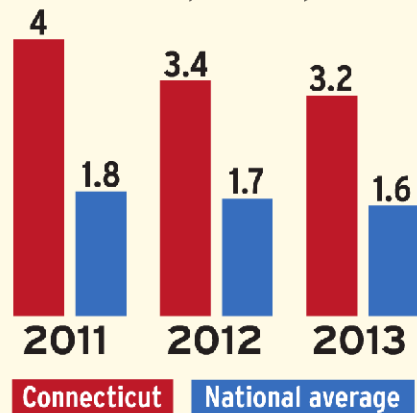
necticut leads the nation in two areas of *Overdrive's* analysis: total violations per inspection (high) and percentage of clean inspections (low). The latter is important because clean inspections help improve carrier scores under the Compliance, Safety, Accountability program.

"The young inspector told me that he always will find something," says Bielucki, and that's exactly what he did: missing reflectors on the back of the cab and under the trailer's taillights.

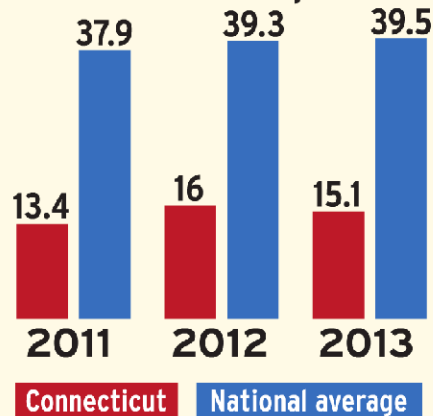
CONNECTICUT

Violation category	Percentage of all violations	National rank
Maintenance	68%	18
Lights	17%	22
Brakes	17%	20
Tires	4%	38
Moving violations	8%	31
Hours of service	9%	35

Violations per inspection



Percentage of violation-free inspections



2013 INSPECTIONS PER LANE-MILE: 5.7
NATIONAL AVERAGE: 5.6

Bielucki tries to avoid the Connecticut DMV when possible – not easy given that a typical day of hauling might take him out of the state and into Massachusetts, Rhode Island and back home. His 30 years of experience tell him the department “seems to have an anti-trucker bias,” though he does give kudos to the Connecticut State Police for the professionalism of a trooper who handled an accident he was involved in years ago.

Lt. Donald Bridge, lead Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Program coordinator for the division, says the overall program is made up of about 150 certified inspectors from DMV, state police and a variety of local jurisdictions.

Bridge is aware of the state’s reputation for being tough on truckers who are put under the microscope of the state inspection program. “We hear that a lot from the drivers,” he says. “We’re thorough.”

In 2013, a scant 15 percent of Connecticut’s inspections resulted in the driver coming away with a clean report, far below the national average of 39.5 percent. Measuring violations per inspection, Connecticut also leads the nation at 3.2, just above second-place finisher Wisconsin at 3.1.

Bridge dismisses charges of nitpicking enforcement and praises officers for focusing on what he calls the “bad operators” – those who tend to show their colors by “following too close, speeding, doing things that they shouldn’t be

doing.”

Vehicles that obviously are in questionable condition are more apt to be selected for Level 1 inspection by weigh-station personnel, Bridge says. Officers are trained to not waste time on brand-new trucks.

A big part of the department’s hiring process for inspectors is to assess the candidate’s mechanical expertise, and Bridge points to himself as an example. A former trucker, he’s also been a mechanic and a safety manager. “A lot of my personnel are licensed mechanics, and all have some sort of mechanical experience, which helps a lot even when picking out the trucks that should be checked,” he says.

Connecticut’s violation profile bears Bridge out: While the state’s rankings in violation categories fall close to the mean in most cases, it shows more strength on the maintenance side, ranking 18th for maintenance attention overall, with 68 percent of all written violations contributing to carriers’ Vehicle Maintenance scores in the CSA Safety Measurement System.

The good news? If Bielucki’s right about those troopers, you’re most likely to catch a Connecticut inspection away from the weigh station, and that’s relatively unlikely unless you’re committing a moving violation. In 2013, inspections at one of Connecticut’s six scales accounted for only 33 percent of its inspections. As in other states covered in *Overdrive* in recent months (Maryland, Pennsylvania), mobile roadside enforcement has been on

VIOLATIONS PER INSPECTION: MOST DIFFICULT STATES, SHOWING THE HIGHEST NUMBER

Connecticut 3.2 Arizona **2.6**
 Wisconsin **3.1** Idaho **2.5**
 Texas **2.9** South Carolina **2.2**
 Rhode Island **2.9** Iowa **2.1**
 Virginia **2.8** Massachusetts **2.1**

CLEAN INSPECTIONS: TOUGHEST STATES, SHOWING THE LOWEST PERCENTAGE

Connecticut: 15.1% Michigan: **19.9%**
 Louisiana: **16.1%** Texas: **21.5%**
 Idaho: **16.5%** South Carolina: **23.2%**
 Wisconsin: **17.7%** Rhode Island: **23.7%**
 Indiana: **18.5%** Massachusetts: **25.2%**

WATCH OUT FOR THE RED ZONE: States coded red are also in the top 10 for number of inspections per lane-mile.

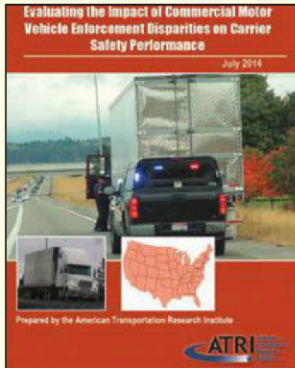
Source: Unless otherwise noted, all numbers based on 2013 federal data analyzed by RigDig Business Intelligence (rigdig.com/bi).

CONNECTICUT SINGLED OUT IN REPORT

Connecticut was shown to be the most violation-intense state across the nation, mirroring *Overdrive's* own analysis, by the American Trucking Associations-affiliated American Transportation Research Institute. ATRI reported in July on the geographical enforcement disparities that, many believe, undermine the CSA Safety Measurement System's effectiveness at scoring carrier safety fairly.

That report was followed by two letters to the U.S. Department of Transportation from a broad swath of industry trade groups calling for SMS BASIC scores to be removed from public view. Read more about that letter and a House bill that followed it on p. 8. ATRI's report also offered a methodology that might normalize scores in the BASICS according to geographic area.

The full ATRI report, "Evaluating the Impact of Commercial Motor Vehicle Enforcement Disparities on Carrier Safety Performance," can be downloaded via atri-online.org/atri-research/safety.




the rise in Connecticut, from 64 percent of all inspections in 2011 to slightly above 67 percent in 2013.

Another bit of good news is that Connecticut's nation-leading violations-per-inspection rate is falling quickly, down 20 percent since 2011; by comparison, the national rate in that time period is down 11 percent. While the CSA program and the bright light it's shone on maintenance issues may be partly responsible, Bridge believes the effectiveness of its enforcement unit's targeted efforts shares in the improvements, extending to CMV crash-dense areas around New Haven and Hartford.

Looking at 2007-08, the I-91/I-95 intersection and general vicinity in New Haven showed almost 200 crashes a year, says Bridge. His department increased inspections and created a visible police presence to go after moving violations. Today, the area shows "well under 50 crashes per year."

Hartford and vicinity, says Bridge, is now the No. 1 crash area, but after years of reductions, the truck-enforcement division's efforts now seem to be showing little added result — similar to New Haven. "We're seeing the number stagnate," Bridge says, and they're moving to a judgment on the problems as resulting from "more a roadway-design issue than a driver-behavior issue."

But don't look for enforcement to lighten up in either region. New Haven is "in the process of a roadway design and change," Bridge says. "As long as we stay focused on our enforcement there" — provided they see a reduction in crashes following the improvement — "we can equate that to the roadway." 

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