Pre-Employment Screening Program (PSP): New Tool Aids Driver Selection

On May 11, 2010, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) launched its Pre-Employment Screening Program (PSP). This is a service that allows commercial motor carrier companies to electronically access driver inspection and crash records as a part of the driver qualifying and hiring process. The program offers access to up to five years of driver crash data and three years of inspection data. This is a national database and is maintained by a private third-party vendor for FMCSA. This database also allows commercial vehicle drivers a chance to monitor their own driving history and to correct any incorrect information. The driver's records are protected in accordance with federal privacy laws, so a signed release is required for carriers to obtain the information. The PSP information is supplied by data from the

FMCSA's Motor Carrier Management Information System (MCMIS). The MCMIS is composed of driver performance data taken from inspection and compliance review results, enforcement data, state-reported crashes (DOT recordables), and motor carrier census data. Individual drivers and carriers can sign up for the PSP by going to www.psp.fmcsa.dot.gov and click on the appropriate link. There is also a link to frequently asked questions regarding the PSP.

PSP is designed to assist the motor carrier industry in assessing individual operator's crash and serious safety violation history as a pre-employment condition. A carrier will pay $10 for each requested driver history. An annual subscription fee of $100 also applies. Carriers with fewer than 100 power units qualify for a discounted annual fee of $25 per year. Individual drivers can request their own personal driving history for a fee of $10. No subscription is necessary for individual drivers.

The use of PSP is optional. However, it does appear to be an excellent way to enhance the

information available regarding a prospective driver and would help round out the driving record that is not contained on the traditional state motor vehicle report.

It is recommended that carriers include using the PSP in their pre-employment process. The information can be useful in determining whether the applicant would be a good fit for your company. When evaluating the information, there are some points to consider that should not be overlooked.

Carriers should obtain a DOT pin number and access the Compass Portal at www.portal.fmcsa.dot.gov to check for their CSA 2010 safety basics summary. Any carrier with a safety basic close to the threshold percentage for a basic or with deficient safety basics,
should closely consider applicants who have demonstrated a history of problems in those basic areas. Having said that, it is also important not to take the PSP information at face value, and
enough time should be devoted to determine if violations or crashes in a driver's past might need further information to make an accurate determination of the drivers strengths and weaknesses.

For example, a driver may show that there are numerous violations for equipment in his/her past. This may have been caused by the policies of the carrier that the person was driving for,
and where the driver identified problems to the carrier and no action was taken by the carrier. Intermodal operations will sometimes pull equipment that is not theirs and, despite their own efforts to get action on maintenance issues, some repair or maintenance work seems to get neglected. These are examples of where the driver may be a victim of circumstances.

A driver applicant who seems to do well in most areas but does have some blemishes in one area, such as fatigued driving, may also be someone who has something to offer. The driver

may have been in violation because of ignorance of the rules, a misunderstanding of the rules, or been with a carrier that encouraged running on the edge. In these cases, the carrier would have to decide if the applicant is someone that can be trained in the proper way of operating and if it is worth it to take the necessary time and effort to retrain the applicant.

A driver with multiple crashes in his/her history may also require more information. The database in PSP contains all crashes that involved FMCSA (DOT recordables). It does not make a distinction between preventable and non-preventable. Further information would be needed to understand the root cause and again determine if the applicant is someone who can be retrained. It is a difficult call sometimes to determine who is a safe driver and who has just been lucky.

PSP is information that was not available to carriers before and should be used as one of the elements in driver selection along with those required by FMCSA in the regulations, results of your own company driver standards, and your own good common sense. It seems that all of the information that a carrier obtains will lead to one of three choices: hire the applicant, hire the applicant but train them to correct suspected weaknesses in past performance (document the training), or do not hire the applicant. The choice is yours.