

New Offsite Safety Audit Enables Auditors to Reach More Carriers, Address Safety Issues Sooner

By **Dee Williams**, Chief, Compliance Division, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation

Audit travel costs were reduced by 58 percent and the time spent on audits decreased by 33 percent.

In Leesburg, Florida, Tpr. Michael Weaver conducts many safety audits on new motor carriers from his office, eliminating time-consuming and costly travel to those carriers' place of business. Florida is one of six states that participated in the New Entrant Offsite Safety Audit Test Program, a joint Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) and state partner program that enables auditors to remotely evaluate a new entrant motor carrier's basic safety management controls.

Agencies save time and money by conducting offsite audits on carriers whose performance indicates understanding of and compliance with regulations, while still conducting the more resource-intensive onsite audit on higher-risk carriers (e.g. passenger carriers or carriers with high SMS scores) that require additional attention.

"This increased efficiency within the New Entrant Program enables agencies to meet the regulatory obligation of conducting audits on all new entrant carriers within a stricter timeframe than previously required," according to Sgt. Charles Smalley of the Florida Highway Patrol's Bureau of Commercial Motor Vehicle Enforcement.

Sgt. Smalley pointed out that the offsite safety audit does not replace the one-on-one connection and educational opportunities an auditor may have during an onsite safety audit; however, auditors can get more done in accordance with regulations by concentrating efforts on the carriers that require the most attention. Auditors review documents that carriers submit electronically or via fax or mail to determine if the carriers have sufficient safety management practices in place.

Alaska, California, Florida, Illinois, Montana and New York participated in the test program, which ran July 2013 through December 2014. These states effectively reduced their overall audit travel costs by 58 percent. Further, by conducting about 60 percent of the states' safety audits offsite, they also reduced the overall time spent on audits by 33 percent.

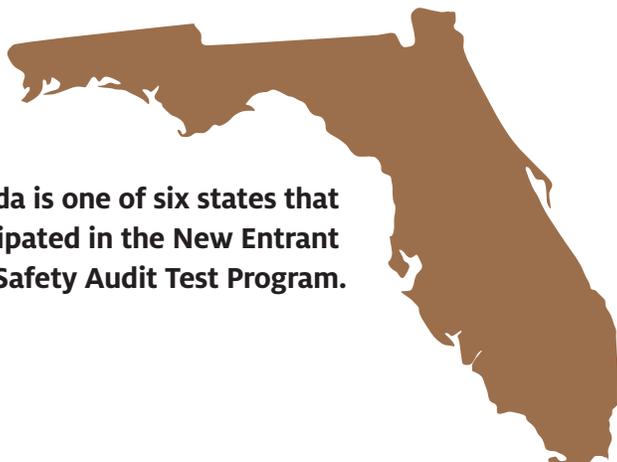
Tpr. Weaver said that some of the biggest challenges were getting to know the offsite safety audit manual and new IT system, as well as teaching carriers how to identify and submit the correct documentation.

"The key thing for people to remember – if they are nervous or concerned about this system – is that you are still doing a safety audit. It's the same audit, but it's more streamlined," said Tpr. Weaver.

He stated that he understands why some auditors may be concerned about the new process but, at the same time, the new system offers significant safety benefits and added flexibility.

"Just look at the stats for Florida and the other pilot states, and you'll see that it works. We have a good program coupled with some good people. It's a win-win."

The offsite safety audit program will roll out nationwide beginning with a limited number of states in summer 2015, and will gradually add states over the next three years. ■



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