

DOT Inspections

What Is an Annual DOT Inspection?

An annual dot inspection is a yearly checkup on a commercial vehicle to ensure that it is safe and compliant with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) standards.

During this detailed inspection, a qualified mechanic will review all of the major interior and exterior components of your rig. If everything is good to go, they'll sign off on your annual inspection report, complete your annual inspection sticker, grab your cash and you'll be on your way. This cost about \$50.00 to \$150.00 per vehicle. These inspections are different than your typical DOT officer Level 2 or 3 inspections that are completed on the roadside inspection or at a weigh station.

You won't get a DVER or Driver/Vehicle Examination Report for this inspection, it won't count against your CSA BASIC scores and you won't receive a CVSA sticker as a result either due to this is done by a mechanic not a DOT officer.

Which Vehicles Require an Annual DOT Inspection:

Per FMCSA CFR 396 regulations of periodic inspections, there are a number of vehicles that require an annual DOT inspection, including:

- Commercial motor vehicles that weigh over 10,000 pounds
- Vehicles that transport more than 16 passengers (including the driver)
- Vehicles that transport hazardous materials
- Passenger buses
- School buses

Pro Tip:

Drivers must log their time being inspected correctly!

Remember, drivers are only "Off-Duty" if they: Are relieved of all duties and responsibilities, are free to leave the vehicle, and are free to do activities of their own choosing

What Does an FMCSA annual inspection Consist Of?

To get your vehicle inspected, you'll need to take it to an acceptable inspection facility. The inspection process typically takes between 30 minutes to 90 minutes.

An annual dot inspection is a thorough inspection of a commercial vehicle to ensure that it is in compliance with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations.

This comprehensive check ensures that each truck, bus and trailer meet all Department of Transportation (DOT) requirements. This includes a visual inspection of the vehicle's exterior and interior, as well as a test of its braking, steering, and lighting systems. The DOT inspector will also check the vehicle's tires, wheels, and suspension components for any signs of wear or damage. Even the windshield wipers will be inspected!

The following vehicle components or systems will be inspected during your annual DOT inspection:

- Brake System, including the following components or systems:
- Service brakes, brake linings or pads, parking brake system, brake drums and rotors, brake hoses, brake tubing, low pressure warning device, tractor protection valve, air compressor, electric brakes, hydraulic brakes, vacuum systems, antilock brake system, automatic brake adjusters
- Coupling devices, including:
- Fifth wheels, pintle hooks, drawbar/towbar eye and tongue, safety devices and saddle-mounts
- Exhaust System
- Fuel System
- Lighting Devices
- Safe Loading
- Steering Mechanism
- Suspension
- Frame
- Tires
- Wheels and Rims
- Windshield Glazing
- Windshield Wipers
- Motorcoach Seats (in passenger carrying CMVs)
- Rear Impact Guard

The FMCSA Annual Inspection Form

Once this major periodic inspection is complete, the inspector will give you a DOT annual inspection form and may complete DOT Inspection Stickers for you.

NTA members can also grab a **blank FREE** Annual Vehicle Inspection form in the Members Only Portal.

Pro Tip:

Be sure that the Annual Inspection Form is fully completed and have the inspector complete a "Qualified Inspector Form" as well.

Officers have requested these documents during a few DOT audits that we have been a part of recently.

It is required by Walter P Rawl to always keep a copy of your annual DOT inspection form in the truck. You either have to have the annual DOT inspection form OR a completed DOT annual inspection sticker on the CMV at all times. You must have one or the other.

Not having a DOT annual inspection form in the truck (or a DOT annual inspection sticker on the truck, bus or trailer) is essentially the same thing as not getting it done in the first place to the FMCSA.

They're really big on "if you didn't document it or can't prove it, then it didn't happen". The FMCSA and State DOT officers are huge sticklers about DOT maintenance record requirements!

DOT Annual Inspection Sticker Requirements

How to Fill Out your Annual DOT Inspection Sticker:

To fill out an annual DOT inspection sticker, you will need:

- The vehicle's identification number (VIN)
- Your DOT number
- The date of the annual inspection

You will also need to provide your company's name, address, and contact information. Be sure to write clearly and in permanent marker!

Where To Put FMCSA annual inspection Stickers:

There is no definitive answer to where a DOT annual inspection label or decal should be placed. There are a few different options depending on your vehicle and preference. However, some common locations for placing the annual inspection sticker include the inside of the windshield on the driver's side, or on the bumper near the license plate. Most put trailer inspection stickers on the front left of the trailer and closer to the pigtail hookups.

Who Can Perform Annual DOT Inspections:

Do you have to be certified to do annual dot inspections? No, not exactly. There is no certification board here. But the FMCSA requires that you're "qualified" in case of an accident or if a question is brought up. A qualified inspector must perform every FMCSA annual inspection. **Legally, only qualified truck inspectors can certify that the vehicle is in compliance with all applicable DOT regulations.**

FMCSR CFR 396.19 outlines all annual dot inspection requirements.

Here is a brief rundown of what you have to do to be a qualified annual inspector (CFR 396.19 Inspector qualifications):

To be a qualified vehicle inspector, you must:

- Understand the inspection criteria in CFR 393 and CFR 396 appendix A and be able to identify defective components
- Be knowledgeable of and have mastered the methods, procedures, tools and equipment used when performing an inspection
- Be capable of performing an inspection by reason of experience, training, or both.
- You have to have successfully completed a Federal-or State-sponsored training program that qualifies the individuals to perform commercial motor vehicle safety inspections or have a combination of training or experience totaling at least 1 year.

How Much Does A Annual DOT Inspection Cost?

It depends. Generally, you can expect to spend between \$50 to \$150 for a annual DOT truck inspection and between \$40 to \$100.00 or so for your trailer's annual federal inspection. Of course, prices vary as does the quality of the inspection that you will receive! We've heard of some places simply pencil whipping the FMCSA annual inspection for as low as \$35. But a company that goes this route has to know that it isn't worth the paper that the annual vehicle inspection report is written on.

How Often Do You Have To Get An FMCSA Annual Inspection?

DOT inspections are required annually for all vehicles that fall under the Department of Transportation's jurisdiction. This includes all commercial motor vehicles, such as semi-trucks and buses.

CMV drivers must ensure that their truck and trailer are inspected at least once every 12 months. You could do this major inspection each quarter or even every month. But, the time and money involved usually prevents most trucking companies from doing that.

Can a driver Do My Own Annual DOT Inspection?

Probably not a good idea... But it is possible if you meet the definition of a qualified annual inspector under CFR 396.11. The FMCSA states in 396.17(d), that the motor carrier (or Intermodal Equipment Provider) is actually responsible for completing the required annual DOT vehicle inspection of their equipment.

But motor carriers began to adopt the independent contractor model and outsourced most of their vehicle inspections and repairs. Most trucking companies don't have qualified mechanics on staff these days. So, the FMCSA expanded the definition of who could legally complete these inspections.

Where To Get Your Annual DOT Inspection

There are a few options for getting your FMCSA annual inspection. You could have a truck repair shop (or commercial truck inspection business) do it or you can have a qualified inspector come to your location. Per the FMCSA in CFR 396.17(e):

"A motor carrier or intermodal equipment provider responsible for the inspection may choose to have a commercial garage, fleet leasing company, truck stop, or other similar commercial business perform the inspection as its agent, provided that business operates and maintains facilities appropriate for commercial vehicle inspections and it employs qualified inspectors, as required by § 396.19."

If you're a qualified inspector you can also purchase a DOT inspection kit, which includes everything you need to perform the inspection yourself.

Most truckers or fleet owners just go to Google and type in "where to get annual dot inspection near me". This is usually a good way to find a number of truck repair or service shops to do your annual inspection done.

Next Success Steps:

Don't be one of the 12,000 trucks receiving a 12-point vehicle maintenance CSA violation each month!

1. Be sure to get your trucks and trailers both inspected at least once every 12 months.
2. You can check current compliance quickly. Have your drivers take photos of their current annual inspection form or their DOT inspection sticker with their smartphone and sending them to you.
3. Track every truck and trailer's Annual DOT inspection expiration date! Just use a simple spreadsheet to ensure that your fleet remains in compliance. You can use Google Sheets and a free extension named "Add Reminders" to have expiration notices sent directly to you via email.

If you need help with this or any other parts of your vehicle maintenance program, just let us know! We're here to help.

