

The CDL Data Quality Cycle

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In this video, we will walk through a simplified scenario of a CDL case, highlighting the importance of each stakeholder's role in collecting and exchanging data.

Cases involving commercial drivers represent a small portion of criminal and traffic caseloads and are easy to overlook. Having accurate data to identify or flag these cases is helpful to ensure they are handled in compliance with federal regulations. However, courts rely on Law Enforcement to collect that data from the incident and the driver license agencies rely on courts to pass along court data. When the process works, dangerous drivers are disqualified, improving the safety of our roads. However, there are multiple places in the data cycle where information may be missed, and these cases can slip through the cracks.

We start our scenario with the commercial driver, in her personal car speeding down the road, when the state police stops the vehicle to write a citation. During the traffic stop, the officer also discovers a large quantity of drugs in the vehicle and writes a criminal complaint in addition to an infraction for speeding more than 15 miles per hour over the limit.

The criminal complaint is a paper form with multiple text boxes. The officer copies down the DLN and class code and discovers the driver has a commercial license issued by a different state. While writing the cited statute sections, the officer also adds a note in the comment section that the drugs were found on the passenger seat of her car.

Data collected on the complaint or citation is used by all other stakeholders and determines what federal regulations and penalties apply. So, it is critical for the officer to capture complete and accurate information- especially the driver's license class and endorsements to clearly indicate the driver has a commercial license. Also, what vehicle was used in the incident, and if it was a CMV.

There are many challenges roadside where the data may not be captured, or problems arise.

- The driver may not have their license or present false information
- Out of state licenses may be encrypted and unreadable by a scanner
- Paper forms can lead to illegible handwriting or transposing figures
- Statutes cited may not be specific enough to align with the federal regulations, like how many miles over was the driver speeding?

In our story, important information that the vehicle was used in the commission of the crime was captured in the comment section, not as part of cited statute or data element. And since the complaint was handwritten, some of the driver license numbers were unclear- was that a 7 or a 1?

The officer delivers all the documentation from the incident to the prosecutor's office, where staff enters the complaint into their system. The prosecutor reviews the case and moves forward

with three charges: speeding 15 over, an infraction; possession of a controlled substance, a misdemeanor; and intent to deliver, a felony.

The prosecutor files the three charges with the Circuit Court. Although the driver license number was included as part of the filing documents, there was a typo when a 7 was entered as 1. And the CDL endorsement was overlooked since the driver was in a personal vehicle.

The charges that the prosecutor files will define the data available to the court. Ensuring that the CDL status of the driver and vehicle information is included for both infractions and criminal charges is critical, especially when infractions and criminal cases are filed separately. Prosecutors should also add a notice to felony criminal complaints that their CDL could be affected by a felony conviction.

The court clerk receives the filing from the prosecutor and manually inputs the required data into the court case management system, with an incorrect DLN and the missing CDL endorsement.

The case is placed on the felony docket and during the pre-trial conference, the driver's lawyer negotiates a plea deal. The felony intent to deliver charge was dropped and the driver pleads guilty to the misdemeanor possession charge along with the speeding 15 over. Without any flag or indication this was a CDL case, the judge didn't know to call a hearing to discuss the consequences of this plea deal.

Throughout the court adjudication process, there are multiple key events and data elements that need to be passed on to the state driver license agency. The final disposition and charges, and date of conviction are crucial for every case. But depending on case events, failure to appear or pay, traffic school completion, or a drug test refusal- all are relevant data elements for the driver license agency and impact driver record updates.

For courts, programming what events trigger an SDLA data exchange, selecting what cases to send, and what data to include are all potentials for CDL cases to be missed.

In our story, the Circuit Court prepares their file of abstracts to send to the SDLA. They sort disposed cases for those with convictions of motor vehicle related offenses. Our case, with the speeding infraction, gets batched with the file for all drivers, as no CDL endorsement was noted.

The SDLA receives the nightly exchanges of convictions from the court. In-state drivers have points applied and commercial privileges withdrawn based on the convicted offenses. For out-of-state drivers, like the one in our story, the SDLA prepares a file to send to CDLIS- the system used for out-of-state record updates.

Because the driver license number had a typo, the Central Site (or CDLIS) rejects the conviction, and it isn't forwarded to the state of record. The update isn't complete. Our case sits in a queue, waiting for manual review and intervention.

When there are data or transmission errors, updating the record takes extra time and may result in missing the 10-day time standard set by federal regulations.

However, worse is when a driver that should have a disqualification or update, is missed completely and the record isn't updated at all.

For our case, there were multiple mistakes with collecting and processing information.

- The typo with the driver's license number
- The missed note indicating the vehicle was used in the felony
- The dropped CDL endorsement
- A plea agreement with reduced charges
- And missed opportunities to review the CDL case and information

So, the driver's record hasn't been updated, and the file waits in a queue – while the driver is still on the road. If the driver had been convicted of using a vehicle to commit a felony involving a controlled substance, she would have had a lifetime disqualification for her commercial driving privileges. Even just the conviction for speeding 15 over, will be reflected on her record to track for subsequent driving behaviors once it gets processed.

States are working on implementing technology solutions to improve data collection and transmission. However, just as important is for stakeholder agencies to collaborate throughout every step of this process. Creating a working group with all stakeholders represented provides a forum to discuss the nuances and challenges of the data cycle, and new ways to improve data exchange.

Data is generated and builds with each stakeholder, and the safety framework only works if the right information gets to each stakeholder and the data cycle is complete.

This series of videos presents guidance on multiple strategies to assist courts in improving the processing of commercial driving cases. A transcript of this video and a supplemental resource guide with additional information is available on the Commercial Driving Resource Center Website.