

# **DataQs Challenges Take Time, So Start Early!**

Correcting data takes a long time, so be quick!

DataQs is the system the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) has in place that allows carriers to challenge data the FMCSA has on file about them. This data is used in multiple systems, but most importantly it is used to calculate a carrier's BASIC scores in the CSA Safety Measurement System (SMS). The issue is that the DataQs process takes time.

Filing a challenge in DataQs does not by itself impact a carrier's scores. It only begins a long process that may lower a carrier's score in a specific BASIC slightly.

The first step in the process is entering the challenge into DataQs. This requires being a DataQs user (it takes about 20 minutes to sign up as a DataQs user). DataQs will then forward the request and all information provided by the carrier to the state motor carrier safety office in the state involved (unless the event being reviewed involves the FMCSA, in which case they will handle it directly).

The state motor carrier office involved will then conduct an investigation. They will review the materials provided by the carrier and may check with the officer involved for any additional information or documentation. Once the investigation is complete, they will make a decision or ask the carrier for additional information. The more complex the issue, the longer the investigation will take (an investigation usually takes a week to a month).

If more information is needed from the carrier, the state office will ask the carrier to provide it. Once it is received, the investigative process will start all over again – a good reason for supporting your argument with uploaded documents right from the beginning!

Once the decision is made, the carrier will be notified through the DataQs system. If the carrier was successful, the state involved will send the correction to the FMCSA.

## **Once decided, how long before the change shows up in CSA?**

The short answer is roughly 30 to 90 days, depending on how quickly the information was sent to and accepted by the FMCSA, and where that falls in relation to the SMS (Safety Measurement System) capture and display dates.

As mentioned earlier, the correction needs to be sent to the FMCSA by the state motor carrier office involved. It must then be accepted into MCMIS by the FMCSA (MCMIS is the Motor Carrier Management Information System, FMCSA's database). This normally takes a week or two.

Then, when the next “data capture date” for the SMS comes along, the new data will be picked up and used in the BASIC calculations. The data capture date, also known as the “snapshot” date, is the day the SMS goes out to MCMIS and grabs the last two years of data on a carrier and the most recent MCS-150 information. This is normally between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of the month. After the calculations are completed, the new scores using the new data and the most recent MCS-150 information will be posted. This is normally around the 10<sup>th</sup> of the next month.

### **Changes may not be as big as expected**

When a violation is removed from the calculations, carriers need to remember that only one data point is being removed from (or changed in) the calculations. Normally, the removal of one violation or the change of one number used in the system will not drastically impact a carrier’s final score in the system. As far as getting violations removed, the impact will depend on which BASIC is involved and how many other violations are in the BASIC.

The time weighting process in the SMS is also a factor in how big the impact will be. If the correction involves something that just happened, there will be a bigger impact than if it was an event that took place over a year ago (events that occurred in the last six months are given a time weight of three, while events that took place over a year ago are given a time weight of one).

### **Bottom line: Act quickly!**

Due to the timeframes involved and the time weighting process in the SMS, it is critical that carriers file a DataQs challenge immediately upon noticing that something is not right. Waiting can lead to problems for two reasons. First, it will create problems in the investigative process the state needs to conduct, which may lead to denial of the challenge. Second, the longer the carrier delays the challenge, the less of an impact the correction will have (due to the time weighting process used in the SMS). This means reviewing roadside inspection reports and crash reports as they come in, and challenging errors immediately. Do not wait for the error to show up in the SMS!