Trucking Company Startup Checklist

Every step to start a for-hire interstate trucking company, in order: business setup, USDOT and MC authority, insurance, BOC-3, UCR, IRP, IFTA, Form 2290 and your safety program.

Last reviewed October 26, 2026. Free to print and share.

Phase 1: Set up the business

- [ ] Choose a business structure (sole proprietor, LLC or corporation) with advice from an attorney or accountant.
- [ ] Register the company with your Secretary of State.
- [ ] Get a free Employer Identification Number (EIN) from the IRS at irs.gov.
- [ ] Open a separate business bank account.
- [ ] Get any city or county business license your location requires.

Phase 2: Federal registration

- [ ] Apply for a USDOT number (free) through FMCSA registration.
- [ ] Apply for MC operating authority if you haul regulated freight for others across state lines (300 dollars per authority type).
- [ ] Have your insurance company file proof of liability coverage (BMC-91 or BMC-91X) with FMCSA.
- [ ] Have a process agent file your BOC-3.
- [ ] File insurance and BOC-3 within 90 days of your application being published, or the application is dismissed.
- [ ] Wait out the 10-day protest period; authority is issued once insurance and BOC-3 are on record.

Write it down: USDOT number _____ MC number _____ Date applied _____ Date authority active _____

Phase 3: Operating credentials

- [ ] Register for UCR for the current registration year.
- [ ] Get IRP apportioned plates for trucks that run in two or more states and are IRP qualified.
- [ ] Get an IFTA license and decals for IFTA qualified vehicles.
- [ ] File IRS Form 2290 for each vehicle at 55,000 pounds or more and keep the stamped Schedule 1.
- [ ] Get state permits and tax accounts where needed (for example New Mexico, Kentucky, New York, Oregon, Connecticut).
- [ ] Mark each power unit with your legal name and USDOT number on both sides.

Phase 4: Drivers and safety program

- [ ] Register in the FMCSA Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse; owner-operators also name a consortium/third-party administrator (C/TPA).
- [ ] Run a pre-employment drug test and a full Clearinghouse query before any CDL driver does safety-sensitive work.
- [ ] Enroll every CDL driver in a random testing pool.
- [ ] Build a driver qualification (DQ) file for every driver.
- [ ] Install a registered ELD and train drivers on hours-of-service rules.
- [ ] Set up vehicle maintenance files and get an annual inspection for every truck and trailer.
- [ ] Start an accident register (keep it even if it is empty).

Phase 5: Launch and stay current

- [ ] Prepare a carrier packet for brokers: W-9, certificate of insurance, MC authority letter and (if you factor) notice of assignment.
- [ ] Prepare for the New Entrant safety audit (usually within your first 12 months).
- [ ] Put every renewal on a calendar: UCR yearly, IFTA quarterly, MCS-150 every two years, Form 2290 every tax year, IRP and permit renewals.

Resources

Read the full guide: Trucking Company Startup Checklist (guide) (https://opentruckingcompany.com/guides/trucking-company-startup-checklist)

FREE DOWNLOADS

- Trucking compliance calendar (PDF) – Every recurring deadline on one page.
  https://opentruckingcompany.com/downloads/trucking-compliance-calendar.pdf
- Trucking business plan template (PDF) – Fill-in plan for lenders, insurers and yourself.
  https://opentruckingcompany.com/downloads/trucking-business-plan-template.pdf

OFFICIAL FORMS AND LOOKUPS

- FMCSA registration – Apply for your USDOT number and operating authority.
  https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/registration
- IRS: Apply for an EIN online – Free from the IRS; never pay a third-party site for it.
  https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/get-an-employer-identification-number
- Unified Carrier Registration (UCR) – Register and pay UCR each year.
  https://plan.ucr.gov/
- FMCSA Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse – Register your company and run driver queries.
  https://clearinghouse.fmcsa.dot.gov/
- IRS: About Form 2290 – Heavy highway vehicle use tax return and Schedule 1.
  https://www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-form-2290

FREE TOOLS

- SAFER company snapshot – Check your USDOT and authority status the way brokers see it.
  https://safer.fmcsa.dot.gov/CompanySnapshot.aspx

General information, not legal, tax or insurance advice. Rules and fees change; confirm current requirements with FMCSA, the IRS and your state agencies before you file. Open Trucking Company is not affiliated with FMCSA or any government agency.