

Worked Example: One Unit's Maintenance File

SPECIMEN: example only. Names and dates are illustrative. Nothing below is a real record. Every carrier name, unit number, VIN, driver name, mechanic name, date, odometer reading, invoice number and dollar figure on this page is invented to show the shape of a finished file: "Halvorsen Grain & Freight," "Unit 12," "R. Ellis," "Bellwether Truck & Trailer," all of it. Copy the layout. Do not copy a value.

The rule statements are the real thing. The specimen values are fiction on purpose; the intervals, retention periods and citations around them are statements about the rules.

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What this folder is, and what's not in it

This is one unit's file from a fictional 22-truck grain and freight outfit, laid out in the order somebody pages through it. Everything in it was made by one person with a pen, a stapler and one phone call to the shop. There's no software in this folder, no fleet system, and nothing in it took longer than an evening to set up.

Two things are deliberately absent. There's no registration, insurance card, IFTA paperwork or permit in here; those live in the company binder, not the unit folder. And there's no receipt filed on its own anywhere. Every receipt in this folder is stapled behind a work order, which is the single change that turns a shoebox into a record.

How the auditor moves through it, and which direction

They don't open at Tab 1 and read forward. Three of the traces below start with a document that already exists **outside** your building and come looking for the matching page inside it, which is why a folder can be beautifully organized and still fail. Direction is the part nobody tells you.

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OUTSIDE-IN - they start with what they already have
roadside inspection report (their data) → your work order
your unit list / MCS-150 count → one periodic report per unit
the ELD log (Ch. 5) → pre-trip time that matches DVIRs

INSIDE-OUT - they start on your page and follow it forward
DVIR → work order → certification → next driver's signature
Tab 1 (what is this unit) → Tab 2 (what were you supposed to do to it)
→ the records (did you do it)
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That last line is §396.3(b) in order: identification, then the schedule of operations to be performed, then the record of what was actually performed. An auditor reading a folder that way finds the missing middle immediately, because the schedule is the one page most carriers don't have.

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TAB 1: The unit identification sheet

TAB 1 • UNIT IDENTIFICATION SHEET

Motor carrier Halvorsen Grain & Freight, Inc.
USDOT 0000000 (specimen - not a real number)
Sheet last updated 2026-04-19 • in pencil, on purpose

Company unit number ... 12
Type Tractor, 3-axle sleeper
Make Peterbilt
Year 2018
Serial number (VIN) ... 1XPSPECIMEN000012
† deliberately invalid - it contains the
letter I, which real VINs don't use

Tire size 11R22.5, all positions
Plate / state SPEC-12 / OH
Furnished by Owned by the carrier.
(Not owned? Put the furnishing party's
name on this line. See T-48, below.)

Last periodic (annual) inspection 2026-03-06 (Tab 3)
Next periodic due by 2027-03-06
Next scheduled service Item A + B, due
2026-09-02 @ 511,000 mi
Brake work performed by Bellwether Truck &
Trailer (qualification
record behind Tab 3)

► **TRACE:** Tab 1 → Tab 2 → the records. They read this sheet to learn what the unit is, then go looking for the line about it on your schedule.

What the reg asks for here: §396.3(b)(1) wants identification: company number if you use one, make, serial number, year, and tire size. If you don't own the vehicle, add the name of whoever furnishes it.

The last-annual and next-due lines aren't on that list. They're on this sheet because it's the only page anyone reads first, and a due date nobody sees is a due date that passes. Pencil is correct. This sheet changes.

Retention: with the rest of the §396.3(b) records (one year, plus six months after the vehicle leaves your control). **What I'd keep:** the life of the unit. It's one sheet of paper.

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TAB 2: The one-page maintenance schedule

TAB 2 · WRITTEN MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE		
Halvorsen Grain & Freight, Inc. · whole fleet · rev 2026-01-04		
Written by M. Reyes, office · Approved by J. Halvorsen, owner		
ITEM	WHAT GETS DONE	INTERVAL
A	Engine oil and filter	every 15,000 mi
B	Chassis grease, fifth wheel	every 15,000 mi (with A)
C	Brake adjustment + lining check	every 25,000 mi
D	Tires - tread depth, pressure,	weekly, by the driver
	all positions	
E	Lights, wipers, horn, mirrors	daily, driver pre-trip
F	Periodic (annual) DOT inspection	every 12 months
	◀ THE ONE LINE ON THIS PAGE tractors in March,	
	THAT THE RULE SETS, NOT US trailers in September	
G	Air dryer desiccant cartridge	annually, with F
DUE DATES - power units DUE DATES - trailers		
Unit 12	A/B 2026-09-02 F 2027-03 T-40	F 2026-09-18
Unit 7	A/B 2026-08-14 F 2027-03 T-41	F 2026-09-18
Unit 3	A/B 2026-08-01 F 2027-03 T-42	F 2026-09-25
(... one line per unit, every unit, trailers included ...)		

Every interval above except line F is this fictional carrier's own number. They are not a standard, not a recommendation, and not copied from anywhere. Yours come from your manufacturers' recommendations, adjusted for how you actually run

Line F is the exception, and it's the only one. The 12-month periodic inspection is the rule's interval, not this carrier's. Marking it on the page is worth doing: it's the line you may not move when the schedule gets renegotiated at the shop counter.

► **TRACE:** unit list → this page → the records. They count the lines on this page against the number of units you operate. A schedule with nine lines and eleven units in the yard is the finding, and it doesn't take a careful reader to spot it.

What the reg asks for here: §396.3(b)(2) wants a schedule of the inspection and maintenance operations to be performed, including the nature of each operation and its due date. Read that as future tense, because that's the whole trick: this page is the only document in the folder that faces forward.

A schedule with intervals and no due dates is half the record. The interval column says what your system is; the due-date column says the system is running.

Retention: with the §396.3(b) records (one year, plus six months after the vehicle leaves your control). **What I'd keep:** every revision, dated. A three-year stack of revisions is the cheapest proof that this page isn't something you wrote the night before.

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TAB 3: The periodic (annual) inspection report

TAB 3 · PERIODIC INSPECTION REPORT

Motor carrier operating the vehicle ... Halvorsen Grain & Freight, Inc.
Vehicle Unit 12 · 2018 Peterbilt · 1XPSPECIMEN000012
Odometer 496,180
Date of inspection 2026-03-06

Inspected by ... D. Sawicki, Bellwether Truck & Trailer
Inspector qualification record on file yes, behind this tab

COMPONENTS INSPECTED - each marked OK / repaired / N/A
brake system · coupling devices · exhaust system · fuel system · lighting devices · safe loading · steering · suspension · frame · tires · wheels and rims · windshield glazing · wipers · rear-vision mirrors
△ ABBREVIATED FOR THE SPECIMEN - do not use this list as an inspection scope.

Items repaired in order to pass:
left front brake lining - see W0 2026-0288

CERTIFICATION
"This vehicle has been inspected and meets the minimum periodic inspection standards."
Signed D. Sawicki Date 2026-03-06

Decal issued yes, driver's door
THE DECAL IS NOT THIS REPORT.

► **TRACE:** their count of your units → one report per unit. Outside-in. They don't ask "is there a report in here," they ask "is there one for every unit," and those are different questions with different answers.

What the reg asks for here: every commercial vehicle you operate must pass a periodic inspection at least once every 12 months, and you must keep the report. Nothing at the roadside substitutes for it. The one substitution left is a state inspection program FMCSA has accepted as equivalent.

Retention: 14 months from the report date, kept where the vehicle is housed or maintained. **What I'd keep:** three years, or as long as you own the unit. Two reports side by side show a pattern; one report shows a Tuesday.

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TABS 4 AND 5: the DVIR chain, closing correctly

The next four documents are one causal sequence, and they don't sit in one tab. The DVIR and its certification live in Tab 5; the work order and its stapled receipt live in Tab 4. **An auditor working a defect reads 5 → 4 → 5**, which is exactly why the work order number gets written onto the DVIR. That number is the only thing connecting the two tabs, and it costs four characters.

1. The driver finds it: signature 1

TAB 5 · DRIVER VEHICLE INSPECTION REPORT	DVIR 2026-0417
Unit 12 Trailer T-40	
Date 2026-04-17 End of day, 18:40	
Odometer ... 501,240	
DEFECT OR DEFICIENCY - in the driver's own words:	
"Right steer brake grabbing when I come down off the ramp at Bellefontaine. Pulls left. Started this morning."	
Driver signature R. Ellis ← SIGNATURE 1	

Since a 2014 amendment, a property-carrying carrier's driver files a DVIR **only when there's something to report**. And since **18 August 2020** that's true of passenger carriers too, so **no carrier owes a daily no-defect report**. Plenty of checklists still ask for the daily sheet, because for six years passenger carriers did owe it. Which means every DVIR in this folder is, by definition, a defect that needs a documented ending.

Leave the driver's own words on the page. "Brake issue" is worth less than "grabbing, pulls left, started this morning," to the mechanic and to anybody reading it later.

2. The work order: four lines

TAB 4 · REPAIR WORK ORDER	WO 2026-0431
1 Unit and date Unit 12 · 2026-04-18	
2 Complaint Right steer brake grabbing, pulls left. Per driver DVIR 2026-0417.	
3 Correction Replaced right steer brake chamber and slack adjuster. Adjusted both steer brakes. Road tested - pulls straight.	
4 Performed by D. Sawicki, Bellwether Truck & Trailer	
Invoice 44192, \$612.40 - STAPLED BEHIND THIS PAGE	

That's the entire document. Four lines, and it fits on an index card.

► **TRACE:** work order → receipt, never the other direction. A receipt proves you bought a part; it can't prove anyone installed it, and a receipt with no unit number on it isn't a starting point for anything. The staple is what makes the money you already spent count as evidence.

If you turn your own wrenches, you still write this. You're the shop. And whoever does brake work must meet the brake-inspector qualification standard, with a record of it on file.

Retention: this is the §396.3(b)(3) record of repairs performed, so one year plus six months after the vehicle leaves your control. **What I'd keep:** the life of the unit, and hand the stack to the next owner.

3. The company certifies it: signature 2

TAB 5 · MOTOR CARRIER CERTIFICATION OF REPAIR

Same sheet of paper as DVIR 2026-0417. Unit 12.

☒ Repaired. See WO 2026-0431.

☐ Repair not needed for safe operation.

Reason:

Certified by ... M. Reyes, office manager ← SIGNATURE 2

Date 2026-04-18

► **TRACE:** DVIR → certification. This is the single highest-yield check in the whole folder, and it's a yes-or-no. Either there's a signature and a date in that block or there isn't.

Put this block on the same sheet as the DVIR. When certifying is one motion on one page instead of two documents in two piles, it gets done. And step 4 is where this chain almost always breaks.

"Repair not needed for safe operation" is a real, allowed answer. Your call, but write the reason on the line anyway: an unexplained "not needed" sitting under a brake write-up is the weakest page in the folder, and one sentence fixes it.

4. The next driver signs off: signature 3

TAB 5 · NEXT DRIVER'S REVIEW - before the next trip

Same sheet of paper. Unit 12.

I reviewed the report above and the certification of repair.

Driver T. Okafor

Date / time .. 2026-04-19 06:05

Signature T. Okafor ← SIGNATURE 3

Before driving, the driver must be satisfied the vehicle is safe to operate and must review the last report if one exists. In a small fleet the next driver is usually the same driver who wrote it up. That's ordinary. The signature is the point, not the change of hands.

Retention, DVIR plus certification plus this signature, all one page: three months from the date written. **What I'd keep:** twelve months. The reason is in the retention table below.

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TAB 6: The roadside inspection report, and the part of it that gets lost

One more document belongs in this folder, and it's the only one in here written by somebody who doesn't work for you. It arrives folded in a driver's door pocket.

TAB 6 · ROADSIDE INSPECTION REPORT (copy)

Report number OH-2026-SPECIMEN-441
Level I Date 2026-05-21 09:52
Location US-33 scale, Logan County OH
Inspecting agency. state patrol
Driver R. Ellis Unit 12 / T-40

VIOLATIONS WRITTEN

brake adjustment beyond the limit, left rear drive axle
→ VEHICLE PLACED OUT OF SERVICE
clearance lamp inoperative, T-40 right rear
→ not out of service

OUT OF SERVICE YES, brakes. THE UNIT DID NOT MOVE.
Mobile service called from the scale 05-21 10:15
Repaired on the pad, re-measured, released 05-21 14:40
→ WO 2026-0475, Tab 4, invoice stapled behind it

— MOTOR CARRIER CERTIFICATION OF ACTION TAKEN —

the bottom portion of the report - the part that gets lost

[X] All violations noted above have been corrected.
Corrected on 2026-05-21
Signed by M. Reyes, office manager
Date signed 2026-05-26
Returned to the address printed on the report, by mail,
05-26. Postage receipt stapled behind.
Day count inspection 05-21 → returned 05-26 = 5 days

► **Read the dates on this one before you copy it.** This certification was signed and mailed in **May 2026**, when the return was owed unconditionally, which is why the specimen shows a postage receipt. On **22 July 2026** the mail-back became owed only if the issuing state asks for it. **The 15-day certification did not change.** So copy the signature, the day count and the retained copy exactly; treat the mailing as a carrier doing more than required, and check whether your state wants it.

► **TRACE:** their report → your work order → your certification, going back out to them. This is the only trace in the folder that starts and ends outside your building, and it's usually where the whole review starts, because this page was in their data before they ever called you. What they're looking for is a work order on unit 12, dated on or after 05-21, describing a brake adjustment. **The violation isn't the finding. The violation with nothing behind it is.**

What the reg asks for here: when an inspector places a vehicle out of service, it must not move until the violations are repaired: not to the next exit, not home empty. Operating one after that is treated as acute, meaning one instance is the finding, and it sits on the list that automatically fails a new entrant safety audit. Then the second obligation, the quiet one: the **certification of action taken** must be completed and **completed within 15 days** of the inspection. And whether it must then be mailed back changed on 22 July 2026, when the return became owed only if the issuing state asks. The fifteen-day certification itself did not change. Sign and keep the copy either way. Formerly it was returned to the issuing agency within **15 days** of the inspection.

Five days here, not fifteen, and not because anybody was heroic. The rule gives you a deadline; your week has to give it a slot. **Every roadside report comes back to the office the day it's written**, gets read, and if anything was written up the certification goes back inside two weeks with a copy behind this tab. Refusal is

never what kills this form. It sits in a door pocket until it's sun-bleached, because nothing in an ordinary week was ever going to touch it.

Keep the postage receipt. "We sent it" and "here's the signed copy and the receipt" describe the same eight minutes of your life, and only one of them is provable.

One thing this report can't do, and one thing people think it can. It does not cover this unit's annual inspection. No roadside report does, clean or dirty, Level I or Level III. FMCSA removed that option on 22 July 2016 because a roadside inspection never covered every item the annual requires. If someone tells you a clean Level I bought you a year, they are working from a rule that has been dead for a decade. What this report *does* do is start a clock: two violations are written on it, and the certification on the back is now yours to sign and return.

Retention: 12 months at minimum. **What I'd keep:** three years. This is the one document in the folder that a stranger wrote about your equipment, and it's the one somebody will ask about years later.

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The same chain, breaking

Same carrier, different unit, three weeks earlier. This is what an open loop looks like on paper.

UNIT 7 FOLDER, TAB 5 · THE ONE THAT DIDN'T CLOSE — DVIR 2026-0392

Unit 7 Date 2026-04-09

DEFECT: "Left rear brake on the tractor is out of adjustment.
Hear air leaking at the chamber when I set them."

Driver signature L. Trahan ◀ SIGNATURE 1 ✓

— the work order is right there behind it, Tab 4 —

WO 2026-0399 · Unit 7 · 2026-04-10 · chamber replaced, brakes
adjusted · D. Sawicki · invoice 44166, \$488.15 ✓

— MOTOR CARRIER CERTIFICATION OF REPAIR —

☐ Repaired.

☐ Repair not needed for safe operation.

Certified by ... ◀ SIGNATURE 2 ✕

Date

— NEXT DRIVER'S REVIEW —

Signature ◀ SIGNATURE 3 ✕

What this page says out loud. The work got done. The money got spent, on the right unit, the next morning, by a named person. The brake is fine. And what the file says is this: our own driver wrote down, in his own handwriting, that a brake was out of adjustment and leaking air, and no document in this building says anybody did anything about it. That is worse than having no DVIR at all.

► **TRACE:** DVIR → certification → the ELD log. Two blank signature lines change the auditor's question. It stops being about paperwork and becomes "did unit 7 run on the 9th and the 10th," and the log data answers that without your help.

Named consequence. Failing to systematically inspect, repair and maintain is **critical**: it counts as a pattern, so one blank block isn't the finding; the habit is. And a folder of unclosed loops is among the first records subpoenaed after a crash.

The fix, which takes about four minutes per page

1. **Certify it today, dated today.** Check the box, sign it, and write one line on the same page:

Certification completed 2026-07-29. Repair performed 2026-04-10
per WO 2026-0399; certification was not signed at the time.
- M. Reyes

A late certification with the work order behind it is a document. A blank block is not. And the honest note is what separates you from the carrier who tried to make April look tidy.

2. **You must not backdate it.** Never write 2026-04-10 in that date field, and never write a repair record for work that didn't happen. That converts a paperwork gap (survivable, common, correctable) into a falsified record, which is a different and much worse problem. There's no version of this where the backdated page is the better outcome.

3. **Then fix the step, because the file isn't what's graded.** Name the one person who signs certifications, and say the name out loud to the shop and the drivers. Move the certification block onto the same sheet as the DVIR. Then walk the last twelve months and close every blank the same honest way, dated today. If you find more than one, that's the ordinary result, and it's the reason to repair the step rather than the folder.

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Three near misses: labelled wrong, with the fix beside them

Everything above is the folder that survives. These three are what the same drawer looked like before anybody went through it, and they're what turns up most often in folders that already look finished. Each one is shown **wrong first**, because the wrong version is the one you'll recognize.

1. Receipts standing in for the schedule

WRONG Tab 2 holds 31 invoices, oldest 2023, sorted by
date. No schedule page anywhere in the folder.

Those invoices are real work and real money, and plenty of the carriers whose Tab 2 looks like this take genuinely excellent care of their equipment. The problem isn't the pile. It's the tense. §396.3(b)(2) asks for the operations **to be performed**, with due dates. Invoices are the past. A file of them is a history of breakdowns, which is the opposite of the thing being asked for.

FIX: write the one page. Forty-five minutes, whole fleet, and your intervals are already sitting in that pile: you can read them off what you've actually been doing. Then the invoices move one tab over, behind Tab 4, stapled to work orders. Nothing gets thrown away. They were raw material the whole time.

And the ones that name no unit. Sorting the pile turns up the other half of the problem: BRAKE JOB
..... \$488.15, dated, from a real shop, with no unit number, no complaint and no name on it. That

page establishes exactly one fact: that day you spent \$488.15 on brake work. The truck it went on still has no documented repair.

Staple the ones you can place. Keep the ones you can't in a fleet-wide folder.

Here's the one place in this cleanup where I'd be firm with you: **don't assign an invoice to a unit from memory.** Guessing which truck got the chambers is the only step here that can hurt you. A confident wrong entry is a wrong record with your name under it. An honest gap is just a gap.

Then call whoever turns your wrenches and ask for the four lines on everything going forward. Most say yes on the phone. Some will tell you their system already does it, and they're often right.

2. The missing annual on one unit

TAB 1 · UNIT IDENTIFICATION SHEET (specimen) _____	
Company unit number ...	T-48
Type	Trailer, 48' hopper - the spare, parked behind the building
Make	Wilson Year 2016
Serial number	1WSPECIMEN0000T48 ← invalid on purpose
Tire size	11R22.5
Furnished by	Tri-County Hopper Leasing, LLC ← not owned
Last periodic inspection x WRONG	
Next periodic due by	
Ran 11 days in the last 12 months: 3 in August covering a breakdown, 8 in October in the harvest rush.	
NOT ON TAB 2's DUE BOARD EITHER. x WRONG	

The periodic inspection is per unit, not per company. Trailers count. So does the spare, the seasonal unit, and the one that came in from a leased operator in August, and that's the one with no report, every time. Eleven days of operation is operation.

Two blanks, and the second one is the cause of the first. T-48 has no line on the schedule page, so no due date ever came up for it, so nobody ever booked it. **A unit missing from Tab 2 will go missing everywhere else.** Note the "Furnished by" line too: T-48 isn't yours, and its file still is.

FIX: count in the right direction. List every unit first (power units and trailers, owned, leased, borrowed, seasonal) then match reports against the list, and give every unit on that list a line on Tab 2 whether or not it moved this month. Counting reports and hoping the total looks right is how the eleventh unit disappears. Anything without a report gets a shop appointment before it rolls again, today if it's loaded for tomorrow, and a dated note in its folder saying what you found and when the appointment is. Seasonal units are worth booking in the off-season on purpose, when the shop has time and the unit isn't earning anyway.

The near miss inside the near miss: a sticker where a report should be. Half the time the tab isn't empty: there's a photo of the door post, or somebody remembers seeing a current decal. The sticker means an inspection happened somewhere. The report is the compliance document, and the report is what gets asked for. Call the shop that did it and ask for a copy; if they still have it, an emailed PDF closes this today. Ask them to send the report with the invoice from now on, and if the copy is gone the unit gets re-inspected, which is a line item and not a crisis.

3. "Repair not needed" used as a habit

WRONG Four DVIRs on unit 3, four months, same box:

2026-01-12 "Brakes grabby on the right. Feels uneven."
[X] Repair not needed for safe operation. M. Reyes
2026-02-16 "Right side still grabbing. Worse loaded."
[X] Repair not needed for safe operation. M. Reyes
2026-03-20 "Pulls right on hard stops."
[X] Repair not needed for safe operation. M. Reyes
2026-04-24 "Brakes. Same as last time."
[X] Repair not needed for safe operation. M. Reyes

No work order on unit 3 for brakes in any of those
four months. Nothing in the folder records who
looked at the truck, or whether anybody did.

Every box is signed, every date is real, and nothing here was backdated. That second box is a legitimate answer, too: a driver writes up a cracked mirror bracket that still holds the mirror square, and *repair not needed for safe operation* is the honest certification. What makes this wrong is that it has to be a judgment somebody made about that one defect, and four identical certifications under an escalating brake complaint record no judgment at all.

Read in sequence, those four pages are your own company's written account of a brake complaint getting louder for four months while nothing recorded anyone looking at it. The driver escalated. The certification didn't move. This is the near miss that catches conscientious people, because somebody drove that truck each time, felt nothing alarming, and signed the honest-feeling box.

FIX: three things, and the third is the one that lasts. Unit 3 goes to the shop, and the work order's complaint field carries all four DVIR dates in the driver's own words, because the history *is* the complaint. From now on that box gets a reason written on the line beside it ("mirror bracket cracked at the lower weld, mirror square and tight, no movement by hand, bracket ordered, not a safe-operation defect today"), fifteen seconds that turn a stamp into a decision somebody else can evaluate. Then the standing rule: **the same defect reported twice on the same unit goes to the shop**, whatever the first certification said. Second report, not third. A driver who writes up the same thing twice is telling you the first answer was wrong, in the only way the paperwork gives them.

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Retention, by document type

Floors first, then what I'd actually do. The floor is the rule's minimum; the right-hand column is judgment, and it never drops below the floor.

Document	The rule's floor	What I'd keep
Tab 1 identification sheet	1 yr, plus 6 mo after the unit leaves your control	Life of the unit
Tab 2 maintenance schedule	Same as above	Every revision, dated, 3 yrs
Tab 3 periodic inspection report	14 mo from the report date	3 yrs, or while you own it
Tab 4 work order + stapled receipt	1 yr + 6 mo, as the §396.3(b)(3) record of repairs	Life of the unit

Document	The rule's floor	What I'd keep
Tab 5 DVIR + certification + next driver's signature	3 mo from the date written	12 mo (see below)
Tab 6 roadside inspection report + your certification of action taken	12 mo at minimum	3 yrs
Inspector and brake-inspector qualification records	Not stated as a fixed period in the rule	As long as that person or shop does your work

The shortest floor on that table is the one that bites, and obeying it is not a violation. Three months is all the rule asks for a DVIR. Shred on a rolling ninety days and you have done nothing wrong, right up until the roadside violation somebody is asking about turns out to be eight months old, and the DVIR that would have shown that defect was found and closed went through the shredder in June. Twelve months on every unit costs you one file folder per truck. Where a record is cheap and its absence is expensive, keep it longer than you have to. That's judgment rather than regulation, and it's the one place in this folder where I'd tell you to ignore the floor; your call, though, and a carrier who keeps exactly three months is keeping exactly what was asked of them.

One clock near that table isn't a retention period at all, and it's the one that dies in a door pocket: the **certification of action taken**, due to be completed within 15 days, with the mail-back now conditional on the state asking, since 22 July 2026. It's four minutes of work, it lives in Tab 6, and it's covered there.

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The defect-close checklist

READ-DO. Follow it top to bottom like a recipe, not from memory. Steps 5 and 6 are the two that get skipped, and they get skipped by people who were certain they'd remember.

PAUSE POINT: a DVIR with a defect on it has reached your desk. Stop here, before that unit's wheels turn again.

1. Read the defect in the driver's own words. Confirm the page carries a unit number, a date, and the driver's signature. If one of the three is missing, get it now, while they're still in the yard.
2. Answer out loud: does this defect affect safe operation? If yes, that unit is parked until step 6. Write the answer on the page either way.
3. Get the repair done, and get the four lines with it: unit and date, complaint, correction, who did the work. Staple the receipt behind it.
4. Write the work order number onto the DVIR. That one number is the only thing that lets somebody trace this in two years.
5. Sign the certification, on the DVIR itself, dated the day you sign it. "Repaired," or "repair not needed for safe operation" with the reason written in. The named person signs, not whoever's nearest.
6. Get the next driver's signature before the trip, not after.
7. Both pages into that unit's folder, newest on top. Not the shop's pile, not your inbox, not the truck.

The one prohibition that belongs on this page: you must not date any signature earlier than the day it was signed, and you must not write a repair record for work that didn't happen. Late and honest is a document. Backdated is a new problem on top of the old one.

Seven steps. Run them and the folder answers the only question this whole chapter is about, *prove this truck was maintained*, by being handed across a table while you say nothing.

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Where to go from here

This specimen is Chapter 6's worked example. When you're ready to build your own, the blank version of everything above is **The Maintenance File Template**: the per-unit identification sheet, the one-page fleet schedule, a four-line work order sized to print in pads, and the three-signature DVIR loop laid out to laminate and hang in the shop. Ask for it by name.

Keep this page open beside you while you fill the first two folders in. Start with the unit that gets stopped the most, because that's the folder somebody is most likely to ask for. After two, you won't need this page.