How to Choose a Truck Accident Lawyer

Hiring a truck accident attorney is a different decision from hiring a lawyer for a minor car crash. Tractor-trailer claims often involve federal safety regulations, electronic evidence and several insurance policies, and the trucking company frequently has lawyers and investigators working on the crash from the first days. These questions can make a first consultation more productive.

Start with the license

Before meeting with a truck accident attorney, check the basics. Every state bar or licensing agency offers a way to confirm that a lawyer is licensed and in good standing, and many publish disciplinary history. A directory listing or a badge from a rating publisher reflects that publisher's selection process, rather than a license check or a prediction of results. If the crash happened in another state, ask whether the lawyer is licensed there or will work with local counsel.

Ask about trucking experience

Ask how many tractor-trailer cases the lawyer has handled and how recently. A truck accident attorney should be familiar with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations in 49 CFR Parts 390-399, including hours-of-service rules, driver qualification files and inspection and maintenance records. Ask how the firm deals with electronic evidence, such as ELD records, engine control module (ECM) downloads and dash camera video, and whether it works with accident reconstructionists. Ask whether the lawyer has taken truck cases to trial, truck accident lawyer since trial experience can affect how a case is prepared, even though most claims settle without a trial.

Fees and the written agreement

Many injury lawyers work on a contingency fee, which is a percentage of any recovery. ABA Model Rule 1.5(c), which many states follow in some form, requires a contingent fee agreement to be in writing and signed by the client, and to state how the fee is calculated and whether expenses are deducted before or after the fee. Ask who pays case costs, such as filing fees and the cost of depositions and reconstruction work, if there is no recovery. Ask whether the fee percentage changes if the case goes to trial, and ask about the written closing statement at the end of the case.

Who will handle the case

Ask whether the truck accident lawyer you meet will be the one who handles the case, who will manage **18 wheeler accident lawyer** it day to day and how often updates will come. Some firms refer truck cases to other firms or co-counsel with them. ABA Model Rule 1.5(e) generally requires the client to agree to a fee division between lawyers in different firms, with the agreement confirmed in writing, so the arrangement should be explained at the start.

Preparing for the first meeting

A first meeting is more useful when the lawyer can see the documents. Bring the crash report, or the report number if the report is not ready yet, together with photos of the scene and contact details for witnesses.

Letters from insurers, claim numbers and any forms already signed also matter, because they show who has been contacted and what has been agreed to. Medical bills and records, plus pay stubs or other proof of missed work, help document the losses so far. A photo of the company name or USDOT number on the truck is also worth bringing.

Red flags and realistic expectations

Be wary of anyone who promises a specific dollar figure at a first meeting. No lawyer can predict the outcome of a claim with certainty, and the rules on lawyer advertising prohibit false or misleading statements about a lawyer's services. A useful consultation focuses on the facts, the deadlines and the evidence that needs protecting. Ask which statute of limitations applies in the state where the crash happened, because every state sets its own. A commercial truck accident lawyer can explain that deadline in plain terms. This is general information, not legal advice.