Choosing an 18-Wheeler Accident Lawyer: Questions to Ask

Choosing a truck accident lawyer is a different task from choosing a lawyer for a minor fender bender. Tractor-trailer claims often involve federal safety regulations, electronic evidence and several insurance policies, and the trucking company often has its own lawyers and investigators involved from the start. The questions below can make a consultation more useful.

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 also publish public discipline records. A directory listing or a badge from a rating publisher reflects that publisher's selection process, not a license check and not 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 crash attorney should be comfortable 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 handles 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, because trial experience can affect how a case is prepared, even though most claims resolve without a trial.

Understand the fee 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 explain how the fee is calculated and whether expenses come out 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 **experienced truck accident attorney** percentage changes if the case goes to trial, and ask about the written closing statement at the end of the case.

Who does the work

Ask whether the truck accident lawyer you meet will be the one who handles the case, who will manage 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's agreement, confirmed in writing, before lawyers in different firms divide a fee, so the arrangement should be explained up front.

Documents worth bringing

A consultation goes further when the paperwork is on the table. Bring the crash report, or the report number if the report is not ready yet, along with scene photos and the names of any 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. If anyone photographed the company name or USDOT number on the truck, bring that photo too.

What no lawyer can promise

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, since each state sets its own. A big rig accident lawyer can explain that deadline in plain terms. This truck accident lawyer is general information, not legal advice.