Questions to Ask Before Hiring a Semi-Truck Accident Lawyer

Picking a truck accident lawyer differs from picking a lawyer for a minor car crash. Tractor-trailer claims tend to involve federal safety regulations, electronic evidence and multiple insurance policies, and the trucking company often has its own lawyers and investigators involved from the start. These questions can make a first consultation more productive.

Check the license and the record

Before meeting with a truck accident attorney, check the basics. Each state's bar or licensing agency provides 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.

Experience with trucking regulations

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 handles electronic evidence, such as ELD records, engine control module (ECM) downloads and dash camera video, and whether it retains accident reconstructionists. Ask whether the lawyer has tried truck cases before a jury, because trial experience can affect how a case is prepared, even though most claims settle without a trial.

Understand the fee agreement

Many injury lawyers work on a contingency fee, 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 does the work

Ask whether the truck accident attorney at the consultation will handle the case personally, 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.

What to bring to the consultation

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, together with photos of the scene and contact details for witnesses. Insurance letters, claim numbers and any forms already signed matter as well, because they show who has been

contacted and what has been agreed to. Medical records and bills, along with pay stubs or other proof of missed work, help show the losses so far. A photo of the company name or USDOT number on the truck is also worth bringing.

Warning signs

Be cautious of anyone who promises a specific dollar amount at the first meeting. No lawyer can predict the outcome of a claim with certainty, and lawyer advertising rules 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 atlantatruckaccidentlawyers.wiki semi-truck accident attorney can explain that deadline in plain terms. This is general information, not legal advice.