



DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION

RISK MANAGEMENT DIVISION

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TRAILER TOWING SAFETY TIPS

Introduction

This pamphlet was prepared to provide State of Minnesota drivers with the basic information necessary to safely tow a trailer behind a State vehicle. The applicable State agency is responsible for providing training for those drivers involved in towing trailers.

Driver's Responsibilities

- Read and comply with the guidelines outlined in this document.
- Must have experience and training in towing trailers. The agency must provide training for those drivers involved in towing.
- Conduct a pre-trip safety check using the checklist included in this document.

Tow vehicle

- Each vehicle equipped with a trailer hitch should have a label identifying the vehicle payload, towing capacity, type of hitch, size of hitch ball, etc.
- The operator must verify that the towing capacity for the tow vehicle is adequate. Gross Combined Vehicle Weight (GCVW) is the gross combined vehicle weight of the tow vehicle and coupled trailer. Operator must refer to the towing label.
- The operator must also verify that the trailer hitch and ball on the tow vehicle is the proper class and size for the trailer being towed. There are four standard classes of ball type trailer hitches. For those State agencies using trailers equipped with a pintle hitch system for heavier loads, the operator must refer to the towing label.
- The hitch ball must be examined to determine that it is the correct size for the trailer hitch. The operator must refer to the towing label.
- The operator shall verify that the hitch, hitch ball, trailer coupler, safety chains, and wiring harness are in good condition.
- Passenger vans with a capacity of ten or greater will not be used for towing.

Trailer

- If the trailer does not have fenders, wheel flaps are required.
- The trailer must be equipped with lights and safety chains to secure the trailer to the tow vehicle, as required by state law.
- If the trailer has a gross weight of over 3,000 pounds, the trailer must be equipped with brakes.

Cargo

- The trailer should be loaded from front to rear and balanced from side to side. (When connected, the trailer and the tow vehicle should be level at the hitching point.)
- All cargo must be secured with certified tie downs and/or chains.

- Only transport cargo the trailer is designed to carry.
- All chains and tie down straps used to secure cargo must comply with Federal DOT regulations, including annual testing.
- The four-point tie down system must be used at each corner to secure rolling cargo stock.
- All guidelines in this brochure apply to both open and closed cargo trailers.
- During the trip, the cargo should be checked at each stop.

Operation

- Travel at a reduced speed and maintain a safe following distance. (State law requires a minimum following distance of 500 feet in rural areas.)
- Drivers will travel at an appropriate speed based on the trailer size, weight of the cargo, road conditions, and weather.
- Tires should be blocked, both front and rear, before uncoupling the trailer.
- Whenever possible, a spotter should be used when backing.

When a spotter is not available, the driver must exit the vehicle to make sure the path of travel is clear of obstacles to the rear, and that there is adequate side and overhead clearance. The driver will roll the window down and turn off the radio before backing the vehicle.

Pre-Trip Checklist for Towing Trailers

- Check tires for proper tire pressure on the trailer and vehicle.
- Make sure all wheel lug nuts are tight.
- Check hitch to make sure it is secured and the correct hitch ball is installed.
- Make sure the receiver hitch is secured with a safety pin.
- Check the pintle hitch to make sure the safety pin is in place.
- Make sure all lights are working properly.
- Make sure the safety chains are in place and secured. The chains should be crossed below the trailer tongue.
- Check that all cargo is securely fastened on the trailer.
- Be sure the trailer jack is raised and locked in place.
- Remove all debris from the trailer.
- Check and adjust all mirrors before driving.
- Check to make sure the trailer brakes are operational, if so equipped.

**Report all defects to the supervisor and maintenance personnel.
Do not use a trailer until the repairs have been completed.**

Develop a form for an agreement by the vehicle driver that they have received, read, and understand the information contained in “Fleet Safety Standards for Towing Trailers.”

I have received a copy of “Fleet Safety Standards for Towing Trailers” and have had the opportunity to read it and ask questions and/or obtain clarification about any of its provisions.

Driver’s Name _____

Driver’s signature _____

Position _____

Date _____

For additional information regarding towing and trailers, contact:

**Minnesota State Patrol
Commercial Vehicle Enforcement
Information Line – (651) 405-6171**

This information will be made available in alternate formats such as large print, Braille, or cassette tape, upon request, by calling (651) 201-2594.