

Trailer Safety



This week is Trailer Safety Week. Trailers are often used in the workplace — from operations personnel down to even the sales department who may move their exhibits from show to show. The construction industry uses a lot of trailers to move equipment. With the summer season, our employees may be using trailers to haul boats, ATVs, campers, or extra large smoker grills. U-Hauls can be rented by anyone for moving from house to house or to move a kid to or from college, to haul cars or other items. Here are some trailer safety tips to help avoid a potential accident:

- **Choose the right tow vehicle and trailer for the load.** Review the tow capacity and ensure it's capable of handling the weight of the trailer and what you're going to be towing on it. Exceeding the capacity can severely affect handling, braking and damage your vehicle's suspension. Check the hitch for the maximum trailer and maximum tongue weights it can safely support.
- **If you're going to be carrying additional loads or passengers in the vehicle,** check the gross vehicle weight rating issued for your vehicle and make sure the load will not exceed that rating, nor that the combination of the trailer and vehicle weights will be exceeded.
- Make sure you have the **proper hitch ball** for the trailer. Incorrectly sized hitch balls are the #1 cause of trailer accidents.
- **When hauling loads,** 60% of the load on the trailer should be placed on the front half of the trailer, with a tongue weight of 10-15% of the total weight that's loaded on the trailer. Ensure weight is evenly distributed on the left and right sides of the trailer.
- **Straps are critical** — broken or cheap straps can fail fast. Use ratchet straps for anything heavier than an average person and use more than one strap in case one comes loose. The working load of the strap should be more than the weight of what you're hauling. For vehicles, strap vehicles at four points of the trailer corners.
- **Check your tires** on both the vehicle and the trailer. Underinflation can cause rolling resistance and forces the engine to work harder and consume (now more expensive) fuel.
- One of the most common trailer issues is **lights** — make sure your lights work before you leave, make sure the load doesn't obscure them and take spare bulbs and fuses with you.
- **Check your brakes** and make sure the breakaway cable is properly attached to your tow vehicle. In the event the trailer somehow disconnects from the hitch, the cable will trigger the trailer brakes.
- **Always cross safety chains** so that they form a cradle for the tongue to fall down onto.
- **Adjust your mirrors** so that you can have a clear view of the entire trailer, to the end.
- **Carry spare parts** such as at least one trailer spare tire as well as extra wheel bearings and hubs.
- **When unhooking the trailer** from the tow vehicle, use wheel chocks in front of and behind the trailer's tires to ensure it doesn't roll away.
- Towing can stress your engine, so **make sure your vehicle has all of its fluids** to prevent overheating. Make sure your vehicle has proper levels of coolant, oil and transmission fluid.
- Be patient when passing and take extra care when changing lanes.
- **Don't speed and know the speed limits** of the trailer and of your state/local area. Some areas have specific speeds for trailers.
- **Stop gradually when possible and allow for plenty of stopping distance** between you and the vehicle in front of you. It takes longer to stop when pulling a load. Scan the road ahead to anticipate potential problems.
- **Watch out for trailer sway.** High winds, large trucks, downhill grades and high speeds can lead to your trailer swaying. If you're not careful, it can swing like a pendulum. Consider using a hitch stabilizer or a sway control unit to help alleviate this issue.
- **Don't drive in if there's no way out.** It's easy to get blocked in, so make sure there's plenty of space to make a complete turnaround.