

**Towing Safety Guide**

Trailer towing has the dubious distinction of being the number one loss-liability incident in the equipment rental industry. It has occupied that position practically since the first equipment rental dealers rented the first trailer. Although some equipment rental dealers have decided that the risks of trailer renting are not worth the benefits, the rental industry still offers consumers and contractors a long list of trailers from which to choose.

In most markets, consumers and contractors can depend on their local rental store to provide a wide array of utility and light-equipment trailers that can meet almost every need. When you rent a trailer, it makes sense to take time to acquaint yourself with basic safety guidelines, specific to trailers. Most accidents involving trailers are the result of carelessness and the failure of the driver to observe basic safety rules. Trailer towing is safe when precautions are taken.

**Before You Tow**

Follow these pre-tow safety precautions before you go out on the road to ensure your towing experience is safe and hassle-free:

Know the towing laws in your state. Follow the link at the end of this article for a state-by-state listing of applicable towing laws.

Use a towing vehicle prepared and capable of handling the load.

Towing a trailer requires special awareness because of the changed driving situation – be alert.

When towing, it takes longer to start, stop and pass – use training and practice to avoid accidents.

Turning and backing up present new problems – plan ahead.

Require each driver to be fully trained and experienced in trailer towing before going out on the road.

Be sure the trailer is fully prepared and properly connected to the towing vehicle.

Observe maximum towing speed limits when towing.

Do not modify or change your rented trailer in any way.

Adjust load on the trailer so tongue weight is approximately 10 percent of the gross trailer weight and center load side-to-side to reduce fishtailing.

Tighten all parts, bolts, nuts and mounting hardware.

**Loading your trailer**

Proper loading is essential to safe towing. OVERLOADING can cause serious injury or equipment damage. DO NOT OVERLOAD your rented trailer.

Follow these steps to make sure your trailer is properly loaded:

Do not overload the trailer.

The Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR) is the maximum total trailer weight with the engine-driven welding generator and all equipment such as tools, cables and shielding gas cylinder installed.

The Gross Axle Weight Rating (GAWR) is the maximum load-bearing capacity of the trailer’s axles.

GVWR and GAWR information can be found on your rented trailer’s frame, usually near the front of the trailer. Locate these ratings and familiarize yourself with the ratings. DO NOT exceed your rented trailer’s ratings.

Weigh your trailer after you have loaded it. Adjust weight by removing accessory equipment if necessary. Call your local authorities to learn the location of the nearest scale location.

Use gross trailer weight to select a proper towing vehicle.

**Tilting and Tongue Weight Precautions**

UNCONTROLLED TILTING OF TRAILER AND INCORRECT TONGUE WEIGHT can result in personal injury, equipment damage, fishtailing and loss of control of the towing vehicle. Follow these precautions to avoid accidents, injury, and equipment damage:

Distribute weight to that trailer tongue is approximately 10 percent of gross trailer weight.

Tongue weight is the amount of trailer weight that rests on the towing vehicle – that is, the downward pressure on the coupler.

Remove or adjust the trailer load to get correct tongue weight.

Do not let tongue weight exceed coupler and hitch rating.

Use slower speeds when towing a trailer to prevent fishtailing. Know your state’s trailer towing speed limits.

**Safety Chains**

Safety chains are required on all trailers, but if safety chains are hooked up improperly, they are useless. A common mistake when towing a rented trailer is failure to cross safety chains. ALWAYS CROSS SAFETY CHAINS WHEN HOOKING UP YOUR RENTED TRAILER

Always use safety chains when towing.

Cross safety chains under coupling to prevent the tongue from dropping to the ground.

Allow only enough slack for tight turns.

Do not let safety chains drag on the ground.

Twist safety chains equally from hook ends to take up the slack.

Use safety chains rated equal to or greater than twice the maximum gross trailer weight rating.

**Hitch Ratings**

INCORRECT SIZE OR RATING OF HITCH can cause the trailer to break loose from the towing vehicle.

Be sure towing vehicle hitch is the correct type, size, and rating to match coupler.

Be sure the hitch is properly installed onto the towing vehicle.

On optional ball couplers, always insert hitch safety pin before towing.

Make sure hitch and ball are properly sized and match each other.

**Chocking**

WHEELS MUST BE CHOCKED when the trailer is uncoupled from vehicle

Chock in direction of grade.

Position chock snugly behind the tire.

Place chock square to tire.

Tap chock into place.

For added protection, chock both sides of the tire.

Tilting

UNEXPECTED TILTING OF TRAILER can cause injury and damage.

When the trailer is uncoupled from the towing vehicle, use a jack on the front and block rear to prevent tilting.

Use proper blocks that are large enough and able to support the necessary weight.

Always chock the wheels when uncoupled.

Working lights

INCORRECTLY WORKING LIGHTS can cause accidents.

State and Federal regulations require trailers used on highways to have tail, stop, turn and side marker lights.

Lights are not required for trailers designed for off-road use only.

Check all lights and connectors for proper installation and operation before using the trailer.

Check the condition of wiring harness leads, plugs, and connections regularly.

Replace any broken lenses, reflectors or bulbs.

Torque, Tire Pressure, and Bearing Maintenance

INCORRECT TORQUE on lug nuts or INCORRECT TIRE PRESSURE or BEARING MAINTENANCE can cause loss of control resulting in serious injury and equipment damage.

Recheck lug nut torque after the first 50 miles (80 km) of towing and periodically after that during the duration of your rental contract.

When checking lug nuts, make sure they are clean, dry and un-lubricated.

Maintain correct tire pressure according to sidewall data on the tire – under-inflation is the most common cause of tire trouble.

Trailers With Breaks

If you’re renting a trailer with surge-type breaks, additional safety precautions are necessary. INOPERATIVE SURGE-TYPE BRAKES OR WRONG BREAKAWAY CABLE CONNECTION can cause accidents.

Check brake fluid level before each use during the duration of your rental contract.

Do not use sway control devices – keep coupler free to telescope during braking. NEVER ALTER ANY RENTED EQUIPMENT

Always connect breakaway cable to the towing vehicle – be sure it has a direct free pull.

Do not wrap the cable around safety chains, tongue, wiring or any other parts.

The breakaway cable automatically applies the trailer brakes if separation occurs.

Hardware and Fasteners

LOOSE OR INCORRECT HARDWARE AND FASTENERS can cause injury and damage.

Periodically double-check all nuts and bolts for tightness and condition.

If it is necessary to replace a fastener, call your rental dealer to ensure replacement with one of equal size, grade, and type.

**DO NOT ATTEMPT TO REPAIR OR PERFORM ANY MAINTENANCE ON RENTED EQUIPMENT**