



Trailer Towing Safety Tips

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list of information on towing safety. You are encouraged to read the towing specifications and requirements for your vehicle, tow hitch and trailer prior to travel.

Before Towing a Trailer

Employees should follow all applicable state laws when towing trailers. In Alabama the following laws apply:

- Maximum trailer length – 40 feet
- Maximum trailer width – 8 feet
- Maximum trailer height – 13 feet 6 inches
- Weight requiring trailer brakes – 3,000 pounds or more

Employees are encouraged to review [Alabama Code Title 32, Chapter 9 – Trucks, Trailers and Semi-Trailers](#) for more information, particularly on weight specifications.

Employees are encouraged to practice towing in a safe location prior to their trips.

The tow vehicle must be a proper match for the trailer and load to be carried. A vehicle may have the power to pull a loaded trailer on a level surface but not have the power to haul it up steep inclines. Alternatively, the vehicle may not have brakes capable of safely holding both the tow vehicle and trailer. Follow the manufacturers' towing specifications for the tow vehicle, trailer, ball and hitch and never exceed the recommended maximum towing capacity of either. Too much trailer weight or an improperly loaded trailer can cause an accident. 12 and 15 passenger vans should never tow a trailer.

Check the owner's manual of the vehicle for the recommended gross vehicle towing weight and other towing specifications. Vehicles must not carry or tow loads beyond their rated capacity. Be certain to load trailers properly. Ensure all trailer loads are distributed evenly over the axles. Too little weight on the hitch can cause both trailer and vehicle to fishtail. Too much weight on the hitch can cause the front of the towing vehicle to rise, resulting in possible loss of steering control or the hitch itself to drag. It is recommended that approximately 60 percent of the load be put toward the front of the trailer. Load the towing vehicle such that it can be handled safely on any road or highway. Adjust your driving techniques and slow down to accommodate hauling heavy loads.

Make sure trailers are properly and securely hitched to the towing vehicle. Safety chains should be securely connected and the lighting connector attached firmly. Make certain all taillights, brake lights and signal lights work properly before entering on any road or highway.

Inspect tires and wheel bearings before each use. Bearings should be properly lubricated. If the trailer has brakes inspect them daily and make sure all connections are intact. Trailer tires should be properly inflated based on towing specifications by the tire manufacturer located on the tire sidewall.

Loading the Trailer

Do not allow passengers to ride on the trailer.

Load and unload on level surfaces. Always make sure the brakes are locked before loading.

Use tie downs or chain binders with sufficient load strength to secure loads to the trailer. Avoid using bindings that are worn, frayed or rusted badly. Check bindings regularly while traveling to ensure no bindings have loosened or that the load has shifted. Consider, if appropriate, the use of a tarp to cover the load, particularly when small, loose items are being hauled.

When loading, place the predominantly heavier items at the bottom and the lighter items near the top to avoid a top heavy load that subjects both vehicle and trailer to possible overturn.

Avoid where possible, creating a load taller than the tow vehicle itself. Be mindful of any aerodynamic issues created, not to mention any clearance requirements associated with power lines, tree limbs or bridges along the projected route.

Keep decks free of dirt, oil, and debris. Steel decks can be slippery when wet and extra caution is needed when loading and unloading.

Trailer beds that tilt, should be securely locked in position before moving.

Towing the Trailer

Employees are encouraged to use a maximum towing speed of 45 mph. Reduce speed and increase following distance to compensate for any extra stopping distance necessitated by the load being hauled. Avoid sudden stops - anticipate traffic lights and slow down early. Slow down when traveling over bumpy roads, railroad crossings, and ditches.

Check brakes while at a low speed to be sure they will stop the vehicle and the trailer comfortably.

When towing a trailer down a hill use the same gear and speed as when going up the hill.

When changing lanes or pulling back in front of another vehicle, consider the added length of the trailer and allow sufficient distance between you and the other vehicle to clear. Always use turn signals when changing lanes.

Use your mirrors frequently to check traffic conditions both beside and behind you. Be conscious of potential blind spots.

Trailers tend to cut corners more sharply than a towing vehicle, making wider turns at curves and corners often a necessity. A trailer's wheels are closer to the inside of a turn than the wheels of your tow vehicle, making them more likely to hit or ride up over curbs. When this occurs, a previously secure load can get upset, requiring a re-check of the load and bindings.

When possible, avoid situations where the trailer must be backed. The trailer will go in the opposite direction of the tow vehicle. Having another person assist with backing the trailer by standing to the rear and side and providing instruction is very helpful. Turn the vehicle's wheels to the right to make the trailer go left, and vice versa. Sharp steering wheel corrections will cause the trailer to jackknife and may cause damage to the rear of the tow vehicle or the front of the trailer. Use slight movements of the steering wheel to adjust direction. Exaggerated movements will cause greater movement of the trailer. If you have difficulty, pull forward and realign the tow vehicle and trailer and start again.

For more information on trailer towing safety please visit the following sites:

[Alabama Driver Manual](#)

[NHTSA – Towing a Trailer](#)

[Trailer Towing Safety Precautions](#)

[Gross Trailer Weight & Tongue Weight Chart](#)

[General Towing FAQ's](#)

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