

Load safety.

There are a number of hazards relating to vehicle loads. Some of the hazards are covered in Risk Essentials guidance on loading bays. Load security and falling loads are a significant issue, particularly for curtain sided trailers. Loads falling in a depot put drivers and operatives helping with unloading at risk and incidents occurring on the public highway put third-party road users at risk. The misconception that the weight of a load will keep it in place results in many incidents involving loads falling from trailers each year.

Safe loading methods and guidance

Loads or parts of a load falling from vehicles are a common incident that can happen on the public highway or at the point of delivery during the unloading process. To prevent falling load items, consider the following points:

- > Follow manufacturers' advice when using webbing and straps under tension.
- > Monitor wire ropes for rust and damage.
- > Monitor fibre ropes for frays and kinks and ensure that ropes are at least 10mm in diameter.
- > Check chains for corrosion and adhere to maximum weight instructions.
- > Use nets to divide load spaces into compartments and to cover loads to prevent items falling off the trailer.
- > Ensure that trailers are provided with at least 13 pairs of load-securing straps with additional straps being provided as necessary depending on the load.
- > Follow Department of Transport guidance on fitting additional anchorage points to flat bed trailers and do not rely on those fitted as standard to the trailer.
- > Sheets used for load restraint should be used in accordance with their rated load capacity. Tarpaulins should be used for weather protection only and not as a load restraint.
- > Use sheets, nets or hammock straps to spread the pressure if single ratchet straps could damage the load.
- > Give the load a low centre of gravity if possible and stack it against the trailer headboard. Stack lighter load materials onto heavier load materials.
- > Use additional spacers on the load if necessary to increase the angle of lashing and hence increase the downward force of the lashing. Mats on the flat bed can also be used to increase the coefficient of friction between the trailer and the load.
- > Be aware of the requirements of the Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989 and The Road Vehicle (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 if a load needs to overhang a trailer.

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- > Check that the maximum permitted gross vehicle weight and axle weight of the vehicle are not exceeded by the load.
- > When carrying pallets, ensure that both the pallet and its load are secured to the vehicle.
- > When packing items in a container, they should be packed in a manner that prevents the load and any dunnage falling from the container when the doors are open. Curtain sided vehicles should also be checked before opening. Any bulging of the curtain may signify that a load has moved. In that scenario the curtain should not be opened until the load has been inspected from another access point. Potential energy can be stored behind a sealed door resulting in sudden door movement when released and so restraints should be used and caution taken.
- > Tailgates should be removed or locked in the open position before the tipping operation starts.

The load restraint used should always be strong enough to prevent the total weight of the load moving forward under severe braking or half the weight of the load moving sideways or backwards.

Tipping loads

When vehicles have loads that need to be tipped there are particular hazards. Drivers should be provided with training to ensure that they follow these points:

- > Undertake a dynamic risk assessment of the tipping area to ascertain if there are overhead power lines, nearby pedestrians and that the area has firm and level ground.
- > Follow a safe system of work that includes an assessment of the levels of the load before tipping, securing the tailgates in the open position, driving no more than a few metres to ensure the load has left the tipping body etc.
- > Follow a safe system of work in the event of the load sticking in the tipping body.

Actions for managers

Managers should conduct risk assessments on vehicles and loading techniques to avoid the load or part of the load falling off, moving in transit, causing loading or unloading risks or tipping over. A risk assessment should be undertaken for each load. The risk assessment should cover the vehicle, the type of load, the type and length of journey to be undertaken. Other steps should include:

- > Using restraint equipment that is recommended by the vehicle manufacturer, the Department for Transport's Code of Practice and that meets British Standards.
- > Ensuring that load restraint equipment is maintained in good condition.
- > Checking on the performance of different restraints during accidents and taking added precautions for securing loads as necessary.
- > Ensuring that employees are aware of the capacities of the anchorage points on their trailers i.e. 0.5 tonne etc. Wooden trailer members should not be used as anchorage points.
- > Ensuring that curtain sided trucks have their loads secured to the flatbed of the vehicle, never relying on the 'curtains' to keep the load secured and in place unless the trailer body and curtains meet the BS EN 12642 XL standard.
- > Checking that loads do not exceed the height of the trailer headboard. Blocking and additional lashing may be required if the load is moved back from the headboard.
- > Drivers and loaders should be trained and educated in all areas of loading and unloading operations, with regular refresher training session provided on a signed receipt basis.
- > Drivers should be provided with training on driving techniques that prevent loads moving. Changing direction whilst braking is a key causation of load shift and speed also has a contributory factor.

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- > Drivers should be given instructions on what to do if a load shifts and how to unload safely. Also remind drivers to loosen the load restraints and then check the load for stability before the load restraints are removed completely.
- > Ensure that vehicles are not moved whilst any of the load is unsecured.
- > Check that there is safe access and a method of fall protection if the driver or an operative helping with unloading needs to gain access to the flatbed of the trailer or on top of an open container.
- > If your driver is to be required to wait whilst third parties load your vehicle, please ask the organisation who are loading the vehicle to provide a written record of assurance that the loading activity has followed the findings of the risk assessment for the load.

Summary

Load security should be a daily consideration for any organisation that accepts or makes deliveries that involve trailers and containers. For those organisations who accept deliveries, staff should be alert to the risk of third-party vehicles being loaded in an unsafe manner. This could result in a load falling from the trailer. Those organisations who load vehicles for deliveries must be sure to carry out a risk assessment that considers the vehicle, the load and the method of restraining the load.

Legal requirements

Under the Road Traffic Act 1991 a driver who 'uses' a vehicle or trailer that carries an insecure load or an employer who causes or allows a driver to carry an insecure load faces a fine of up to £5,000, and the driver can be given 3 penalty points and disqualification from driving. A driver can also face prosecution for dangerous driving with up to 2 years in jail if found guilty. The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 states all companies have a 'duty of care' for the safety of their employees, including employees who drive for the company. This duty will stretch to the work of employees unloading vehicles when making deliveries to third-party sites. The need for a thorough risk assessment of loading and unloading is therefore critical.

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