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<b>Equipment Info.</b>		
<b>Date of Training</b>		<b>Instructor:</b>

# VEHICLE TOWING SAFETY

When you've got the correct gear, some practice and confidence, towing can be as easy as single-vehicle driving. Yet safety should always be your main concern when you're pulling a trailer. Because no matter how easy and comfortable the process, the fact is that you're towing rig weighs more and doesn't dodge or stop as easily as other cars on the road. If you observe some simple safety rules and practices, you can greatly reduce the likelihood of accidents and handle many emergency driving situations like a pro.



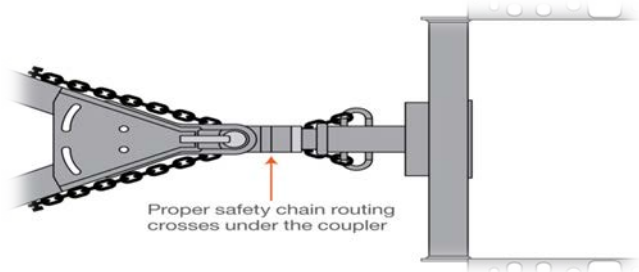
## Basic Trailering Safety Practices

Common sense is your best friend when it comes to safe trailering, and overconfidence is your worst enemy.

The fact is, with modern equipment and a well-prepared trailer and tow vehicle, towing can feel almost as natural as single-vehicle driving, but you should never drive a trailering rig like a single car. When towing a trailer, always keep these guidelines in mind:

**Load your trailer right** - Make sure your trailer's load is balanced with about 60% of the total weight in front (but not too far in front) of the axle. Also make sure the load is centered and secured and that the center of gravity is kept as low as possible.

**Hook up right** - Make sure you have followed the procedure for hooking up your trailer and double-checked all your connections. Make sure your safety chains are crossed under the trailer tongue and securely connected as shown in Figure 11-1.



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**Figure 11-1: Proper safety chain connection**

**Allow plenty of stopping and following distance** - You need to allow much more following distance when trailering. Basic physics dictates that even with the best brakes, it takes longer to stop a big heavy truck and trailer than a small car.

**Be extra careful changing lanes** - Changing lanes is a challenge, especially if traffic in the new lane is moving much faster or slower than you. You simply cannot accelerate quickly to match traffic, and no one likes to be cut off. Make sure you've got wide trailering mirrors installed to give you a clear view of the lane next your tow vehicle and the full length of your trailer. Unthinking drivers will often "park" next to your trailer and hang there for miles.

**Be patient with slower vehicles** - Passing a slower car should be a rare occurrence when you're towing. You have to allow many times the distance normally required to pass another vehicle. Passing on a two-lane road should almost never happen - you should be passing only vehicles that cannot maintain at least 50% of the posted speed. Better to wait for a turnout and hope the slower traffic uses it!

**Be gracious with faster vehicles** - The best way to get down the road safely is to be extra courteous to faster traffic. Use turnouts whenever possible, and when a passing lane comes along, don't speed up to race passing traffic, but rather slow down just a bit to help people get past you in an efficient manner. Your stress level will be reduced and you'll contribute to a courteous culture on the road. Above all, be solid and predictable when someone is passing you. Avoid sudden acceleration, braking, or maneuvers.

**Don't pull in where you can't see out** - It's easy to get stuck with a trailer. You might pull into a small parking lot and have to perform a complicated backup maneuver to get out. Better to park across the street or on the road where you can see your way through.

### **How to Anticipate Problems**

The thing that separates truly good drivers from most others is the ability to see into the future. Luckily, this is something almost anyone can learn to do. To see the future, just use more of the same skills you should always use when driving. Follow these guidelines:

**Take the long view** - Since it takes longer to go, stop, change lanes, and turn with a trailer, keep your eyes up and look ahead farther than you normally do. You can see many problems developing a long ways away. Look through the windshield of the car

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ahead of you, if necessary.

**Watch traffic flow** - You can frequently identify the drivers who may cause problems long before they can make trouble for you. Look for the driver who's weaving through traffic, or who pulls in right in front of a faster car. Keep an eye out for the driver who can't stay in a lane because he's too busy with his cell phone, or the 18-wheeler that's about to lose a smoking tire. Give all potential problems plenty of room, and you can usually do that with just a small speed adjustment.

**Keep an eye out for sway** - if an 18-wheeler blows by you like you're chained to a bridge, especially on a downhill grade, your trailer is likely to be blown around a bit. If you're not careful, your trailer can start swinging like a pendulum. The answer is to simply ride the brakes very gently. If that doesn't work, input a little trailer brake with the brake controller. Just press the button and your trailer will snap right back in behind your tow vehicle.

### **Towing in Bad Weather**

Safe towing in bad weather requires the same common sense for dry daytime towing, and even more of it. High winds will blow your trailer around - I've experienced gusts that pushed my trailer halfway into the next lane! Of course, rain and snow further reduce your traction and greatly increase your stopping time and distance. The key to good foul-weather towing is patience and smooth, gentle driving. Also, be on extra guard for the fellow in a passenger car who should have no trouble, but always seems to lose control right in front of you!

### **When You Have to Stop**

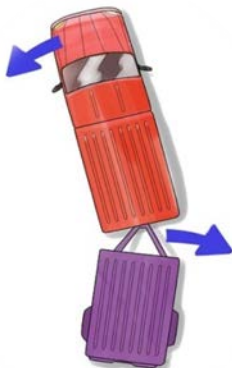
Part of smooth towing is smooth stopping. Keep your vehicle and trailer brakes adjusted and your brake controller working properly - at least 70% of a good stop is in the equipment. Your good sense makes up the balance. Don't ask your vehicle for a full-force stop every time! The more you can baby your brakes, the longer they'll last and the better they'll stop you when you really do need everything you've got.

Specifically, if you're coming down a long grade, drop your tow vehicle to a lower gear and take it slow. Use your brakes in brief, firm presses, pausing between them to let the components cool. If you smell burning brakes on a downgrade, it's almost never your own vehicle you're smelling - it's the people in front of you. Still, if you sense a change in your pedal response on a downgrade, ease off the brakes and let your gears help slow you down.

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### Backing up a Trailer



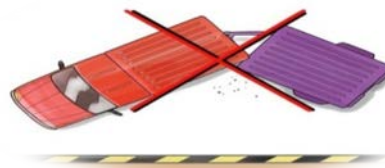
Backing up a trailer at any time is tricky. Backing up a dinghy car is the most difficult and can be done only for very short distances. But there are a few basic rules to live by:

1. The shorter the distance from your hitch to the trailer wheels, the harder it is to back up in a straight and predictable way. Short trailers swing around with the slightest steering input! Long trailers are comparatively easy to back up.
2. Put your hand at the 6 o'clock position on the steering wheel, and the back end of the trailer will go in the direction you move your hand. Use tiny steering inputs - once the back of the trailer starts turning, it will come around fast.
3. If at all possible, ask someone to stand behind the trailer to give you directions and be a second set of eyes.

### Dos and Don'ts of Safe Trailing

#### DO

- Pause after 50-100 miles of towing and check all your hitch connections and adjustments
- Observe all speed limits when towing
- Use lower gears and intermittent braking when descending a grade



Allow much greater following and stopping distances

#### DON'T

- Become complacent about towing on the highway
- Decide to tow without necessary safety gear, even for short distances
- Forget to use turnouts to let other traffic pass by safely

#### Important Notice

- *This Safety Training Topic (STT) does not necessarily cover all possible hazards associated with this equipment and should be used in conjunction with equipment manual. It is designed as a guide to be used to compliment training in the field at Brieser Construction and as a reminder to users prior to equipment use.*

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