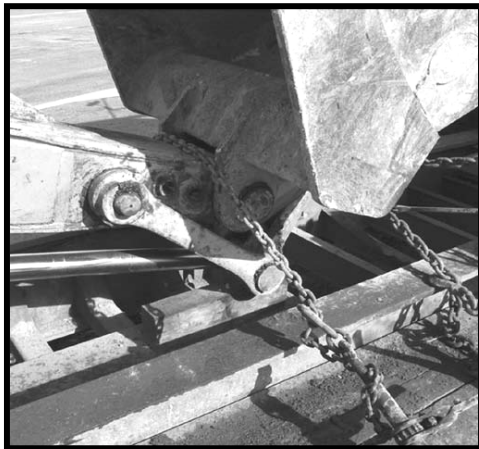




TRANSPORTING EQUIPMENT SAFELY



Remember the saying, "There is never enough time to do it right, but always time to do it over?" If you are in the business of loading and transporting equipment, this should not be your motto.

When transporting equipment, the driver is responsible for many things including the truck and trailer, the equipment loaded on it, and, most importantly, public safety. If equipment is loaded in an unsafe manner it can cause injury, destruction of property and even death. It's too easy to be in a hurry or overanxious to load the truck. It is very easy to ignore good safety practices and legal requirements. In order to keep management happy, it is tempting to rush to get to the job site. Always slow down enough to address safety correctly.

It is the responsibility of the driver to make sure the truck and trailer are safe for transporting and not loaded to exceed rated capacity.

Most trailers have a stamped plate located on the frame stating the rated capacity; mechanical failure cannot be used as an excuse. The driver and agency would then be assuming all liability risk. Overloading will weaken or damage the trailer and can seriously affect acceleration, braking and overall handling. Add wet or icy conditions, and an overload situation increases the danger of an accident even more.

Before loading the trailer, do a walk-around inspection. Check the tires for excessive wear or proper inflation pressure. If you are in the field and a gauge is not available, at least give the tires the hammer test, which provides a good idea if tire pressure is low. Check the lights to make sure they are all in working order, including brake and turn signals. Examine the trailer bed to make sure it is free of dirt, mud, snow and ice. If the bed is not clean, loading can be dangerous as well as creating a possible hazard on the road. Also, check the securing points on the trailer, and make sure the tie-down rings are secure and welds unbroken.

Prior to loading equipment, make sure the trailer is on solid, level ground. Also, make sure brakes are set and/or wheels are chocked so the trailer won't move during loading operations. Loading onto a trailer during rain or simply loading over wet ramps and onto a wet deck is very dangerous. Wet steel or planks get very slippery. The piece of equipment being loaded can easily slip off the ramp or deck and roll over. Next, consider the load to be transported. Walk around the piece of equipment and check for tools that may have been carelessly left on the machine and unlatched doors or chock blocks that may fall during transport.

Know the proper loading position on the trailer. There is not always someone to guide you onto the trailer, but if there is the slightest doubt about the safety of loading a piece of equipment, get some qualified help. Know the safety effects of weight and balance and whether to drive forward or backward when loading. If in doubt, consider the operator's manual for proper loading positioning. Remember, too much weight on the trailer's tongue can affect the steering and too much weight on the rear can decrease traction and braking ability and make steering less responsive. Also, too much weight on one axle, or set of axles, is an illegal overload even if the gross weight is within legal limits. Disregard for rules can result in expensive fines.



Only qualified operators familiar with all machine controls should load and unload equipment. Make sure seat belts are fastened. Keep in mind the only safe place is in the Roll Over Protective Structure (ROPS) while moving a machine. If help is available, make sure hand signals are understood as this may be the only means of communication due to the noise of equipment. Good operators can judge the center but in most instances guidance is helpful. When loading equipment such as backhoes or excavators, make sure to avoid overhead power lines that could entangle a boom. Once loaded, lower all booms, buckets or attachments and remove the keys. It is wise to tape the exhaust stack opening to protect the turbo charger.

Now it is time to secure the load. Check the operator's manual for correct tie-down points for equipment being hauled for the first time. It is better to be safe than sorry. Too often statements like this are made: "Oh, we are just going a little way." Secure the load whether traveling a few feet or many miles. It is actually illegal to move a load without proper tie-downs. Safety standards require a minimum of two tie-downs no matter how small the load.

Chains and slings are the most common means of securing a load to the trailer. Chains and load binders that are legal for transport tie-down use will have a load rating and should be checked before use. Most binding applications require a transport grade 70 binder chain of adequate size. A load binder suitably matched to the size of the chain must be used. Ratchet binders are preferred versus snap-over-center binders. It is very inexpensive to replace chains and binders compared to the financial responsibility for an accident if the restraint fails and serious consequences result.

When securing a load, visualize pulling in opposite directions. Pull towards the front and rear simultaneously, as you pull from the sides. It is helpful to visualize chains as making a big "X" on the trailer deck.

When hauling rubber-tired equipment, secure and then check the load a few miles down the road. Tires will sometimes deflect while being transported and tie-downs can loosen. When hauling steel tracked equipment such as dozers and excavators, remember that steel against steel can slip and shift while being transported. Some equipment needs to be secured with straps and not chains to avoid damaging cargo such as generators or light plants. Again, use proper tie-down equipment.

Finally, know the height and width of your vehicle. Legal width is 102 inches and legal height is 13 feet, 6 inches. Make sure you stay within these limits. If this is not possible, a special permit will be needed on most highways, and restricted height or width conditions near bridges and overpasses will apply. Do a final walk-around inspection after loading. It is best to drive with headlights on when transporting.



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