

Loading and Unloading: Who Releases the Vehicle?

Todd Jerome Jenkins | v1.0 | October 12, 2026 | Discussion + field verification

Why this matters

A delivery can move while a person or forklift is still loading it. The dangerous moment may be the handoff between the driver and receiving crew.

Objective: Verify vehicle securing and departure authorization before loading starts.

Key hazards or failure points

Premature departure; rolling vehicles; trailer movement; mixed signals; people trapped between vehicles and loading equipment.

Practical controls

- Agree the unloading location, driver waiting place and person controlling release. Include the carrier and receiving crew in the same plan.
- Apply the required vehicle-securing arrangement, including brakes and wheel chocks where applicable, and necessary trailer support. Follow the governing requirements and equipment procedure.
- Keep unrelated people outside the loading area. Establish one clear release process after people, equipment and loading connections are clear.

Verify It in the Field

With approach controlled, have the assigned person verify actual securing devices and support against the procedure. Record the vehicle and result.

Confirm the driver understands the waiting location, stop instruction and who authorizes departure. A green light or handed-back paperwork must have an agreed meaning.

Identify how the release person confirms everyone and all equipment are clear. Rehearse the communication verbally with the vehicle secured.

Stop and reassess

Hold loading or departure for missing protection, conflicting instructions, changed vehicle position or anyone entering a trapping space. Correct and reverify before release.

Ask the crew

1. Who authorizes this vehicle to move?
2. What physically prevents unintended movement?
3. How will we confirm the loading operation is clear?

Use this HOP tool — Three-way communication: With the vehicle secured, practice one release message using its identifier and location. The receiver repeats the intended action; the sender confirms or corrects it. Discuss what happens if the reply is missing. This rehearsal does not authorize vehicle movement.

Sources: OSHA 1910.178; HSE Loading; DOE Vol. 2, pp. 26–27. HOP concepts adapted from DOE-HDBK-1028-2009, Vol. 2 (June 2009). No claim to original U.S. Government work; no government endorsement implied.

Free next step: JHA/JSA planning and field-verification worksheet

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/loading-unloading-vehicle-release