

Trailer Towing: Verify the Connection Before the Trip

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Why this matters

A connected trailer is not necessarily a verified combination. The vehicle, hitch, trailer, load and safety systems must work together. Complete the required checks before entering the road, including after someone else coupled or loaded it.

Objective: Confirm combination limits, connection and load readiness using the actual governing instructions.

Key hazards or failure points

Unknown loaded weight; mismatched ratings or coupling; incomplete latch or safety connections; unsecured cargo; defective brakes, tires or lights; people in backing and coupling pinch points.

Practical controls

- Identify the exact vehicle, trailer, coupling and cargo configuration. The responsible driver or transport lead checks manuals, ratings, actual load information and applicable requirements before approving the combination.
- Use the authorized coupling and securement procedure. Secure equipment against unintended movement and keep others out of pinch areas. Agree safe backing communication and stop if contact is lost.
- Complete required pre-trip checks and plan applicable in-transit rechecks at safe locations. Provide the driver with time and authority to correct defects or change the trip.

Verify It in the Field

Compare actual equipment identification and rating sources with verified loaded-weight information. Do not estimate acceptability from how level the trailer looks. Hold an unknown or incompatible configuration for the responsible review.

The authorized person checks the latch, pins, safety devices, breakaway arrangement and required brake operation using the exact procedure. Do not improvise a universal pull test or crawl beneath unsecured equipment.

Check restraints, anchors, tires and lamps against the applicable plan and instructions. Use an agreed stationary lighting check from safe positions. Record actual findings, defects and correction; a previous driver's signature does not complete today's checks.

Stop and reassess

Do not tow with unresolved ratings, coupling, securement or required brake/light defects. Reassess load movement, disturbed connections or changed route and weather. Stop for a recheck at a safe location; avoid creating a new roadside exposure.

Ask the crew

1. What evidence proves this loaded combination is within its limits?
2. Who verified the connection and braking systems, and how?
3. Where will we safely complete the required load recheck?

Before the trip: verify the combination, connection and cargo.

Sources: 49 CFR 392.7/392.9 where applicable; FMCSA scope; NHTSA load securement.

Free next step: [JHA/JSA planning & field-verification worksheet](#)

Expanded guidance, references, supervisor check and attendance record accompany this talk.