8th Western Rivers Safety Message

DATE: 23 APR 2025

SUBJECT: Motor Vehicle Towing Safety Awareness

This message is to remind Auxiliary members of motor vehicle towing and trailering safety practices. Whether towing an AUX facility, communications trailer or other item, risks can be minimized with proper planning, equipment, knowledgeable operators and spotters.

Always refer to the towing vehicle and trailer manufacturers’ operating manuals for specific towing recommendations and limitations.

Safety procedures should include:

* Verify tow vehicle load rating and hitch rating prior to towing.
* Verify load rating for the trailer.
* Verify tow vehicle ball hitch is the correct size for the trailer tongue coupler (e.g. 2 5/16” ball to a 2 5/16” coupler.
* Verify safe operating tongue weight of the vehicle and trailer.
  + Too much weight on the rear of the trailer can result in trailer weaving.
  + Too much weight on the tongue can raise the front of the towing vehicle and degrade driver’s ability to steer the vehicle.
* Evaluate the need for wide-angle mirrors for a better view when backing and turning.

Prior to each tow:

* Complete a Coast Guard Risk Assessment (GAR) Worksheet.
* Verify trailer tongue coupler latch is secured and pinned.
* Verify trailer safety chains are serviceable, fastened to the vehicle and crossed.
* Plug in trailer rear brake lights and check function – braking and turn signals.
* Verify trailer tire air pressure and tread patterns are within safe-operating parameters.
* Identify spotters for close-quarter maneuvering and discuss spotter responsibility and communications.
* When transitioning to or from a covered facility (e.g. garage or shed) ensure doors are fully opened and spotters are in communications with the driver.

During the tow:

* Make wide turns to avoid clipping a curb or other obstructions.
* Leave extra room between your vehicle and those in front as braking distance may be significantly increased.
* Remember to use side-view mirrors as the rear-view mirror will likely be blocked by the boat.
* When you arrive at the boat ramp, check that the trailer hubs are cool to the touch. If they’re hot, the bearings are not functioning properly and need to be serviced immediately.

Sources:

Biswell, Erich. *Motor Vehicle Towing Safety Awareness*. US Coast Guard HSWL Service Center, 4 Apr. 2025. ALSAFETY 009/25.

Rudow, Lenny. *Boats.com*, 14 Mar. 2024, www.boats.com/how-to/boat-towing-basics-learn-how-to-trailer-a-boat/. Accessed 23 Apr. 2025.

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