

## **Trailer Operation Guidelines**

### **Scope**

These guidelines apply to all Drake University employees, students, volunteers, or anyone acting at the direction of and on behalf of Drake while operating a University vehicle or rented vehicle while towing equipment in/on a trailer.

### **Introduction**

University drivers have a responsibility to their passengers, the University, and to the general public with whom they share the highway and driving a motor vehicle while towing a trailer is much different than driving a motor vehicle without a trailer. The weight, length, and reduced rear visibility create risks that require increased awareness and extra caution.

### **Use of Trailers**

University drivers must demonstrate their competency in operating a motor vehicle with a trailer attached. An assessment can be scheduled with EHS.

### **Guidelines for Safe Trailer Towing**

University drivers may tow a maximum of one boat trailer, general utility trailer, or other vehicle behind a passenger or recreational vehicle.

When operating a motor vehicle and pulling a trailer, the driver should be extra cautious. Before towing a trailer for any University business purpose, the following should be reviewed and approved by the driver and the driver's department supervisor:

Prior to starting travel involving towing a trailer:

- Ensure that the tow load is within the towing capacity of the towing unit.
- Physically check (not just visually) that the trailer hitch is properly & securely attached to the tow ball on the towing vehicle AND securely pinned so the hitch cannot pop loose.
- Physically check and test that all running lights, brake lights, turn signals, and hazard lights are properly connected to the tow vehicle and that they operate correctly.
- It is recommended that these steps be double-checked by another person.
- BE AWARE of unique vehicle handling & safety considerations when towing a trailer:
  - Allow more space between the driver's vehicle and other vehicles. It takes more time to stop safely so follow all posted speed limits. Consider driving slightly below the speed limit for additional safety and safe maneuvering.
  - Trailer instability (sway) is more likely to occur as speed increases.
  - When towing on wet road, narrow tires on small-wheeled trailers can hydroplane while the tow vehicle runs normally. On a curve, a hydroplaning trailer may fishtail or even tear loose.
- All trailers must have lights and safety chains.
- Certain trailers must display registration plates.
- In Iowa, trailer brakes are not required on all trailers; however, the driver must be able to stop their combined motor vehicle and trailer within a reasonable distance.

- To be safe, know the tongue weight and hauling capacity of the trailer and the maximum capacity of the towing unit (driver's vehicle) to be sure not to operate the vehicle overloaded. Similarly, check and adjust (as necessary) tire pressure in both driver's vehicle and trailer.
- Check load distribution to make sure the tow vehicle and trailer are properly balanced front to back and side to side.
- Check side- and rear-view mirrors to make sure there is good visibility.
- Avoid sudden stops and starts that can cause skidding, sliding, or jackknifing.
- Avoid sudden steering maneuvers that may create sway or undue side force on the trailer.
- Slow down when traveling over bumpy roads and railroad crossings.
- Make wider turns at curves and corners to allow for proper clearance of trailer within marked traffic lanes.
- The process of backing up with a trailer in tow should involve both the vehicle driver and another person ("spotter") to provide additional safety, as mirrors do not adequately cover the range of maneuvering of a trailer. Drivers should try to minimize situations where they have to back up and if they must back up, drivers should try to position the vehicle so they can back in a straight line. If a driver must back up on a curved path, they should try to get the motor vehicle in a position so that the trailer turns to the left so they can see it from the driver's side. Before a driver starts backing up, they must make sure nothing is behind them and check their mirrors on both sides while backing. When backing a trailer, turn the steering wheel of the vehicle towing the trailer in the opposite direction the trailer needs to go. Once the trailer starts to turn, turn the steering wheel the other way so that the vehicle follows the trailer. If the trailer starts to drift off course, correct this by turning the steering wheel in the direction of the drift.