

Safety Note # 90

## DRIVING SAFELY WHILE TOWING A TRAILER



Photograph Courtesy of REC Admin. Office

Using a trailer requires knowledge about the size and weight of the trailer, correct hitching techniques, proper cargo loading and weight distribution, appropriate load securing methods, state and local requirements for towing trailers, including road, bridge, and tunnel restrictions, and safe trailer driving skills. This Safety Note presents recommendations for driving safely while towing a trailer.

The following recommendations are modified from information given in a brochure printed by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration <sup>(1)</sup>:

- Always use the driving gear that is recommended for towing.
- Drive at moderate speeds. At high speeds, trailer instability or sway is more likely to occur.
- Do not stop or start suddenly. Rapid deceleration or acceleration can cause trailer skidding, sliding, or jackknifing.
- Avoid sudden steering maneuvers that can cause trailer sway or excessive lateral forces on the trailer.
- Reduce your driving speed when towing a trailer over unpaved roads, railroad crossings, or ditches.
- When turning corners or traveling through sharp curves, beware that an adequately wide radius must be maintained to prevent the trailer wheels from riding over curbs or into objects outside the roadway.
- In order to reduce trailer swaying caused by wind buffeting, reduce your driving speed and firmly grip the steering wheel.
- Always be aware that towing an extra load requires additional stopping distance.
- Pass slower vehicles on level terrain. Allow extra clearance when passing.
- When traveling on narrow paved roads, avoid allowing trailer wheels to ride onto the road shoulder. The process of wheel transfer from paved surface to the shoulder may cause the trailer to jackknife or go out of control.
- Downshifting on hills assists with braking when going downhill and climbing when going uphill.
- When backing up, use slight steering movements to better control the trailer.
- When towing a trailer down long downgrades, maintain a slow and controlled speed by repeatedly applying brakes at short intervals.
- Inspect the trailer and tow vehicle before starting out each day - a Vehicle and Trailer Inspection Checklist is available on the EH&S website at <http://safety.ucanr.org>

(1) Brochure Source: *Towing a Trailer - Being Equipped for Safety*, April 2002, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, DOT HS 809 433, 24 p.