



## 14 Trailer Safety Tips

**Use these tips to keep you and your livestock safe when travelling.**

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When parked, you can open the trailer grills or screens to give your animals access to fresh air and sun, but be sure to close them before moving the trailer. It's inevitable. At some point in your farming experience you will need to tow your livestock from point A to point B. Before you and your livestock hit the road, it's necessary to take precautions to minimize potentially dangerous problems.

"You can't be over-prepared when it comes to hauling your animals," says Mark Cole, managing member of USRider, a 24-hour nationwide roadside assistance program for members and their towing vehicles and trailers. "If you're proactive, you're going to greatly minimize the risk of being on the side of the highway."

Cole suggests completing the following 14 safety checks on your truck and trailer before loading your livestock or horses to go to the sale, show or fair:

1. Replace wheel bearings every 12,000 miles you drive or annually, regardless of mileage, due to possible moisture buildup. Carry a spare wheel-bearing set in case of premature failure on the road.
2. Look for dry rot on tires, uneven tire wear, overall tire wear and tire damage.

"You've got to have good tires, right tires," Cole emphasizes. "Good tires are like good shoes. They only hurt once, and that's when you buy them. The right kind of tires will perform and will last longer."

Cole says to replace tires every three to five years regardless of mileage, and always carry two spare tires.

3. Check tire pressure on all tires, including the spares and the inside tire on dual wheels.

To monitor the pressure while driving, Cole suggests a tire-pressure monitoring system.

"Those are worth their weight in gold," he says. "The system lets you put a finger on the pulse of tire pressure from inside the cab. If it changes more than 15 percent, you get an alert; if it drops below 25 percent, you get another alert. If you pick up a nail, it will notify you that you are losing tire pressure."

4. Double-check that the trailer hitch is latched and the correct-sized ball is used.

"People are often in a hurry and forget to latch the hitch," Cole says. "It doesn't come unhitched by itself—you just forgot to latch it! If the hitch is properly latched, it will not separate from the ball."

5. Make sure safety cables and chains are securely connected.
6. Ensure the electrical connection is plugged in and secured.
7. Confirm that the breakaway system is connected and secured.
8. Make sure the emergency battery is charged.
9. Check lights on the trailer brakes and turn signals, as well as the running and perimeter lights.
10. Test to ensure the brake controller is working properly.

11. Before loading horses, check the trailer for any hazards. Cole says mismatched equipment (for example, too large a trailer for a too-small tow vehicle) is a common problem.

"Don't try to tow a heavy horse trailer loaded with horses with a vehicle that is not of the proper weight that can handle it," he says. Although your vehicle may pull and stop the trailer, in an emergency situation, the tow vehicle needs to manage the weight and the forces put upon it by the trailer, and not let the trailer take control.



12. Secure and latch all trailer doors. Use a snap hook or carabineer to prevent accidental opening.

13. Drive with headlights on.

14. Drive safely, allow for greater braking distance, and travel at slower speeds.

Cole says driver inattention (i.e., talking on cell phone, texting, messing with the radio) and driving too fast for weather and road conditions are some of the main causes of trailer accidents.

“You’re hauling a vehicle that is as heavy or heavier than a commercial vehicle. And you have your family members—horses—in the back, and they can’t help themselves.”