

# 5

## Recreational Trailer Safety

### Passengers

You must never drive with people inside your trailer. It is illegal and unsafe. All occupants must be in the truck.

### Loading Your Trailer

The way you distribute items carried in your RV will affect the handling of your truck and trailer. Improper loading can cause the trailer to sway, resulting in loss of steering control or the trailer flipping over while turning. Try to distribute weight as evenly as possible between the left and right sides, and along the length of the trailer. Also keep weight near the bottom of the trailer; store heavy items near the floor rather than near the ceiling. Make sure everything is secure and braced to prevent movement. Cupboards should be locked so that their contents don't spill. Remember also that you need more weight toward the front of the trailer than toward the rear, as you want to have 15 to 25 per cent of the trailer weight on the fifth wheel or hitch connection (pin weight or hitch weight).



#### RoadSense Tip

Make sure propane is shut off before you refuel your truck.

Propane leaks are dangerous, as propane vapour can explode.

### Propane

Many trailers have a propane stove, refrigerator, hot water tank, and heater. RVs with propane appliances should be equipped with propane detectors, which will sound an alarm if there is a propane leak. If you suspect a leak, go outside immediately, turn off the propane at the tank, open all the windows and door, and get an expert to fix it. Always turn off all propane appliances including pilot lights before towing an RV.

### Safety Equipment

You should always carry safety equipment that you could need in emergencies, such as flags or flares, a first aid kit, and fire extinguishers. You may need to carry a hydraulic jack in case you need to change a tire on your trailer.

#### Fast Fact

Diesel fuel is toxic and should never be touched with your hands or cleaned up with a cloth.

### Fire

Preventing fires in and around a vehicle is easier and cheaper than fighting a vehicle fire:

- Never start a vehicle with a fuel leak. Repair the leak and use an appropriate absorbing material to soak up the spilled fuel. Dispose of your cleaning material in an appropriate container.
- Shut off engines when refueling vehicles.
- Don't smoke in garages or near fueling areas.

It is always a good idea to keep a fire extinguisher in your vehicle.

## Firefighting

Fighting a fire requires quick thinking, fast action and some understanding of firefighting. Learn whether there are fire hazards associated with your vehicle.

- Don't risk your own life. Fuel fires can spread quickly or explode.
- Tell the first spectator to call the fire department. Warn others if there is any danger of an explosion of gasoline or flammable goods, or of exposure to toxic substances. Tell them to keep back a safe distance.
- Assess the situation and decide whether it is safe to take any further action.
- If possible, disconnect the truck from the trailer and separate the units to a safe distance apart. Do this only if you are certain it can be done without putting yourself in danger.
- Fight fires with the wind at your back whenever possible. This reduces the chances of you being asphyxiated.
- If the fire is in your electrical system, disconnect the battery cables. When a vehicle is in a crash, shutting off switches and disconnecting battery cables can prevent fires that may be caused by leaking fuel.
- If a fire starts under the hood, direct the extinguisher from underneath the vehicle or through the radiator. Do not open the hood to fight the fire.
- Use your extinguisher to put out the flames, but try to keep some extinguishing fuel in reserve to fight possible flare-ups.
- Do not use water on gasoline or oil fires. Water will spread these fires. Use an appropriately rated extinguisher, sand or dirt to smother them.

## Fire Extinguishers

There are two main categories of fire extinguishers: multi-purpose dry chemical extinguishers and carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) extinguishers. The multi-purpose dry chemical extinguishers are easier and safer to use, while the CO<sub>2</sub> extinguishers are more effective.

Multi-purpose dry chemical extinguishers are available in two classes. A multi-purpose dry chemical extinguisher, which has a cylinder marked BC, can be used to put out grease, oil, gasoline and electrical fires. If the multi-purpose dry chemical extinguisher cylinder is marked ABC, it will also put out Class A fires such as paper, cloth, etc.

CO<sub>2</sub> extinguishers are extremely effective but should never be used in an enclosed space. There is a risk that you could smother yourself if you use these in too confined a space. There is also a risk that you could blister your skin.

## Before Leaving a Campground

- Close the valves for the sewer and gray water and unhook the septic system.
- Unhook the water hose and make sure that you have only enough water with you to get to your next stop. (Extra water means extra weight.)
- If your RV has slide-outs or awnings, make sure they are retracted and fastened.
- Unhook the power line.
- Make sure that roof vents are closed and TV antennas and satellite dishes are retracted.
- Check around inside to make sure that all items are properly stored and there is nothing loose on a counter or table.
- Make sure that the fridge is locked.
- Turn off all pilot lights and all propane tanks.
- Put up the steps.
- Make sure that trailer jacks and supports are raised and secured.
- Move the picnic table if it is in your way.
- Check around the campsite to make sure that nothing has been left behind.
- Make sure you have all your maps and know which way to go.
- Conduct a pre-trip inspection as described in Chapter 3 of this guide.
- Check fuel gauge. Make sure you've got enough fuel.



### RoadSense Tip

It is a good idea to take the fifth wheel trailer out for a short drive every month to prevent damage to the tires from sitting in one position for too long.

## Storing Your Recreational Trailer

Here are some things you should do to store your RV when you're not using it:

- Empty all water and holding tanks. Remove the drain plug from the hot water tank and rinse out the tank. Pump RV antifreeze through the system until all water is removed from the water lines.
- Turn off the propane cylinders and cover the regulator.
- Remove all perishable food from cabinets, and leave cabinet doors slightly open to allow air circulation.
- Turn off the refrigerator, remove all food, and leave the fridge door open.
- Clean the interior of the trailer and close the blinds.
- If possible, leave a window or roof vent slightly open for air circulation.

- If storing your RV for long periods of time or in damp conditions, place moisture removers inside the trailer.
- Remove batteries and store in a dry place. Batteries should be charged every two to three months; check with your RV dealer.
- Cover the tires if they will be exposed to the sun or damp ground.
- Place the trailer on jack stands or blocks to prevent damage to the tires and wheel bearings.
- Check your stored trailer every month or so to ensure that there are no leaks or damage. Also check for animals that may have gained entry.



#### RoadSense Tip

Frequently check the wiring connection for corrosion. This connection is often the reason why trailer lights don't work.

## Maintaining Your RV Trailer Combination

Towing an RV trailer causes extra wear and tear on the tow vehicle, and results in more frequent maintenance, including:

- engine and transmission oil changes and filters
- lubrication of steering and suspension components
- cooling system maintenance
- brakes on both the truck and trailer
- tires and wheel bearings on both the truck and trailer

Remember to check the following frequently:

- Fifth wheel or other type of trailer connection – Make sure it is securely attached and all bolts are tight.
- Wiring – Make sure that the wiring connection to the trailer is clean and shielded from moisture, and that electrical connectors are not corroded.
- Lights – Check that all lights are working on both the truck and trailer.
- Batteries – Keep batteries fully charged. If you have electric brakes on the trailer, make sure the battery for the emergency trailer breakaway system is kept charged. If it runs down, it could affect the operation of the emergency breakaway switch.