

News release

Spot-Checks Highlight Danger Of Unrestrained Vehicle Loads

More than three quarters of vehicles stopped during safety checks in England and Wales were not loaded safely – putting motorists and loading staff at risk.

Officials from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the Vehicle Operator Services Agency (VOSA) stopped 40 vehicles during three days of checks in Wrexham, Birmingham and Humberside.

Although the majority needed remedial action to make the load safe for onward travel and unloading, in most cases drivers were able to solve the problem safely within minutes. Further checks are now planned.

During the last three years, 14 people have been killed and more than 2,000 people have been injured by cargo falling from vehicles when they are being loaded or unloaded.

Marcia Davies, Head of Injury Reduction at HSE, said:

“Although this was a relatively small number of checks the proportion of vehicles with a problem is alarming. The fatal and serious injuries suffered during loading and unloading are needless tragedies and lives are often shattered as a result. Taking simple safety measures can avoid this misery.

“Vehicles which are loaded safely for the road can usually be safely unloaded at the workplace – and vice versa. A significant number of manual handling injuries, falls from heights and accidents caused by falling objects result from poorly restrained loads shifting in transit. HSE will be launching a campaign offering guidance and advice on loading and unloading later this year.”

John Fitch, VOSA’s Research and Development Manager said:

“VOSA and HSE recognise that insecure loads present a great risk to road safety. We are keen to participate in HSE’s new campaign to highlight the issues of insecure loads, provide education and information for the haulage industry and reduce congestion caused by load loss.”

Badly secured loads pose a number of risks, including:

- Shedding loads in transit, endangering other road users and causing traffic disruption.
- Vehicles overturning when they become unstable following a load shifting in transit.

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- Loads moving inside the vehicle during transit which then fall off at the point of delivery, with potential to cause injury.
- Workers climbing onto trailers to deal with a load that has shifted in transit then falling because they have a precarious foot hold, or being struck by parts of the load or suffering manual handling injuries when they try to unload the vehicle.
- Damage to goods being carried

Kate Gibbs, from the Road Haulage Association, said:

“A considerable amount of work has been conducted on the important issue of load restraint. Key stakeholders have been involved in assessing where the main problems are and looking at how we bring about the necessary improvement required.

“Items such as vehicle design and specification, including the correct restraints for specific loads, loading dynamics, route planning, loader and driver training are just a few of the factors requiring consideration prior to despatching loads.”

Jo Tanner, of the Freight Transport Association (FTA), said:

“Overloaded or badly loaded lorries can present a real health risk if they are not managed properly, both during unloading and while in transit. It is of major concern that people are still being killed by something that can be prevented so easily and we fully support the work of HSE and VOSA to help reduce future tragedies occurring.”

Notes to Editors

1. The vehicle checks were a joint initiative by HSE and VOSA.
2. HSE's role is to protect people against risks to health or safety arising out of work activities.
3. VOSA provides a range of licensing, testing and enforcement services to improve the roadworthiness standards of vehicles ensuring the compliance of operators and drivers, and supporting the independent Traffic Commissioners.
4. If they feel there is a serious risk to other road users, workers or to the driver, HSE and VOSA can enforce a range of regulatory powers, including prohibiting the continued use of the vehicle. HSE and local authorities also enforce health and safety legislation at premises where goods are loaded and unloaded.

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