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VOSA
Vehicle & Operator Services Agency

ADVICE TO DRIVERS

Vehicle safety: dangers of overloading

fleet safety forum

The problem

An overloaded vehicle not only causes damage to roads and to your vehicle but it also puts you and other road users at risk. Vehicles react differently when the maximum weights which they are designed to carry are exceeded and the consequences can be fatal. Overloading puts massive strain on vehicle tyres and makes the vehicle less stable, difficult to steer and take longer to stop. It is also illegal. VOSA employees, trading standards officers and police officers carry out random checks at the roadside to enforce overloading regulations.

Who is responsible for my vehicle load?

Ensuring the vehicle is not overloaded is the moral and legal responsibility of **you and your employer.** In addition to this, if anyone else causes or permits an overloaded vehicle they may also be charged with committing an offence.

All companies have a 'duty of care' under the **Health and Safety at Work Act 1999** for the safety of employees at work. This means that an employer must do all it can to ensure the safety of its driver, including having policies in place to ensure that their vehicles are not overloaded.

The Road Traffic Act 1988 requires "vehicle users" to ensure that vehicles are not overloaded. If a vehicle is found to be overloaded both the driver and operator could be prosecuted or cautioned. Legislation imposes fines of up to £5,000 for each offence. That's each overloaded axle plus any overloading on the total weight. Also, if a vehicle is dangerously overloaded the driver could face a charge of Dangerous Driving which carries a maximum penalty of two years in prison. Other offences within the Road Traffic Act include refusal to allow the vehicle to be weighed and obstruction of an officer which also carry a maximum fine of £5,000. If a vehicle is overloaded and results in someone being killed, both you and your employer could face going to jail for Manslaughter or Death by Dangerous Driving.

What will happen if my vehicle is found to be overloaded?

If your vehicle is found to be overloaded by an enforcement officer it can result in a prohibition notice which will prevent you from continuing your journey until the weight is corrected. This may mean the goods being unloaded to bring the weight down or being redistributed (in axle overload cases). You will then be issued with a 'removal of prohibition notice' to continue your journey. You may alternatively be issued with a 'direction to drive notice' which allows you to drive to a specified place to off-load.

What precautions should I take when towing a trailer?

Towing a trailer puts greater demand on the vehicle and the driver. Information on acceptable trailer towing weights can be found in vehicle handbooks. You should ensure that:

- **The vehicle does not exceed either the Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW) or the Gross Train Weight (GTW).** The GVW is the maximum permitted weight of the vehicle (plus any load it is carrying), while the GTW is the maximum permitted weight of the vehicle plus any trailer being towed (plus any load being carried in the vehicle and trailer);
- **Any vehicle with a chassis plate which is towing a trailer has the maximum GTW added to its chassis plate.** Otherwise, if the vehicle is weighed at a check point, the total weight could appear to exceed the maximum gross weight;

ADVICE FOR TRUCK DRIVERS

Between April 2002 and March 2003 7.51% of trucks checked by VOSA (Vehicle Operators Services Agency) in roadside checks were found to be overloaded.

To ensure that your vehicle is not overloaded you should:

- **Know the weight and weight limit of your vehicle.** The maximum permitted axle weight and Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW) can be found on a plate which is usually located in the vehicle cabin, under the bonnet, or on the chassis of trailers;
- **Be careful not to mix up the Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW) with the Gross Train Weight (GTW).** The GVW is the maximum permitted weight of the vehicle (plus any load it is carrying), while the GTW is the maximum permitted weight of the vehicle plus any trailer being towed (plus any load being carried in the vehicle and trailer);
- **Remember that the GVW includes the weight of the vehicle, driver, load and any passengers.** Also allow for the weights of any pallets or packing cases;
- **Ensure the load is distributed appropriately** to avoid overloading axles. After any drop-offs, re-check the distribution of the remaining load;
- **Ensure the GVW is checked before setting out** using an in-house or public weighbridge. While public weighbridges can be used to obtain accurate GVWs, in some cases the approach and exit paths are not sufficiently flat or level to give accurate results for axle weight, which should if possible be checked using an in-house weighbridge;
- **Never automatically trust declared weights, invoices or delivery notes given to you by customers.** Remember that you and your employer hold the responsibility for not overloading, not the customer.

ADVICE FOR VAN DRIVERS

Vans have the highest prohibition rate of overloaded vehicles with just over one in five vehicles weighed by VOSA between April 2002 and March 2003 being prohibited.

To ensure that your vehicle is not overloaded you should:

- **Know the weight and weight limits of your vehicle.** Maximum permitted axle weight and Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW) can be found in your driver handbook or sometimes on a plate located by the bulk head or by the driver or passenger door;
- **Be careful not to mix up the Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW) with the Gross Train Weight (GTW).** The GVW is the maximum permitted weight of the vehicle (plus any load it is carrying), while the GTW is the maximum permitted weight of the vehicle plus any trailer being towed (plus any load being carried in the vehicle and trailer);
- **Remember that the GVW includes the weight of the vehicle, driver, load and any passengers.** Also allow for the weights of any pallets or packing cases and anything on a roof rack;
- **Ensure the load is distributed evenly.** After any drop-offs, re-check the distribution of the remaining load;

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- **Ensure the GVW is checked before setting out** using an in-house or public weigh-bridge. While public weighbridges can be used to obtain accurate gross weights, in some cases the approach and exit paths are not sufficiently flat or level to give accurate results for axle weight, which should if possible be checked using an in-house weighbridge;
- **Never automatically trust declared weights, invoices or delivery notes given to you by customers.** Remember that you and your employer hold the responsibility for not overloading, not the customer.

ADVICE FOR BUS AND COACH DRIVERS

Although you may think that the opportunities to overload PSVs are much less than for other types of vehicles, according to roadside checks carried out by VOSA, overloading offences among PSV operators are increasing. PSVs mainly become overloaded due to the amount of luggage being carried.

To ensure that your vehicle is never overloaded you should:

- **Know the weight and weight limits of your vehicle.** The maximum permitted axle weight and Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW) can be found on a plate which is located either on the chassis (often in the engine bay) or on the bodywork inside the vehicle (usually by the entrance or emergency door);
- **Be careful not to mix up the Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW) with the Gross Train Weight (GTW).** The GVW is the maximum permitted weight of the vehicle (plus any load it is carrying), while the GTW is the maximum permitted weight of the vehicle plus any trailer being towed (plus any load being carried in the vehicle and trailer);
- **Remember that the GVW includes the weight of the vehicle, driver, passengers and any load (for example luggage);**
- **Find out the purpose of the trip.** This can tell you a lot about the luggage that passengers are likely to be carrying or plan to pick up on route. For example, if you are taking shoppers on a day trip to Calais to shop in a hypermarket the weight of your vehicle could increase dramatically on your return trip. If your passengers are going skiing or somewhere else where they need lots of heavy equipment the vehicle weight will be high;
- **Ensure a weight limit has been given to each passenger for their luggage;**
- **Never automatically trust declared luggage weights from your passengers.** Remember the responsibility of ensuring your vehicle is not overloaded is on you and your employer and not the passengers. Ensure you have suitable equipment to weigh luggage yourself;
- **Distribute the load appropriately** to avoid overloading axles. After any passengers are dropped off re-check the distribution of the remaining load;
- **Do a final check of the GVW before setting out to ensure the vehicle is not overloaded.** You can do this using an in-house or public weighbridge. While public weighbridges can be used to obtain accurate GVWs, in some cases the approach and exit paths are not sufficiently flat or level to give accurate results for axle weight, which should if possible be checked using an in-house weighbridge.

ADVICE FOR CAR DRIVERS

Exceeding weight restrictions can cause a car to become unroadworthy and also constitutes a legal offence. The police can identify overloaded cars visually due to the car's back end being close to the ground or the tyres looking strained or flat.

To ensure that your vehicle is never overloaded you should:

- **Know the weight and weight limits of your vehicle.** Gross Vehicle Weight limits vary according to the make and model of the car. Check your vehicle handbook for both the weight and weight limit;
- **Be careful not to mix up the Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW) with the Gross Train Weight (GTW).** The GVW is the maximum permitted weight of the vehicle (plus any load it is carrying), while the GTW is the maximum permitted weight of the vehicle plus any trailer being towed (plus any load being carried in the vehicle and trailer);
- **Remember that the GVW includes the weight of the vehicle, driver, load and any passengers.** Also allow for the weights of any pallets or packing cases and anything on a roof rack;
- **Ensure the GVW is checked before setting out** using an in-house or public weigh-bridge. While public weighbridges can be used to obtain accurate GVW's, in some cases the approach and exit paths are not sufficiently flat or level to give accurate results for axle weight, which should if possible be checked using an in-house weighbridge;
- **Ensure the load is distributed evenly** to avoid overloading axles. Ensure heavy loads are placed lower in the vehicle. After any drop-offs, re-check the distribution of the remaining load;
- **Never automatically trust declared weights, invoices or delivery notes given to you by customers.** Remember that you and your employer hold the responsibility for not overloading, not the customer;
- **Adjust tyre pressure accordingly.** Depending on what weight you are carrying you may need to increase or decrease your car's tyre pressure. Guidance on tyre pressure can be found in the vehicle handbook.

REMEMBER: If you have any questions regarding the load you are carrying or if you think that there is a problem with the weight of your vehicle, do not hesitate to ask your manager. Do not continue your journey until the problem is solved.

This information sheet is produced by the Fleet Safety Forum, a division of Brake, the national road safety charity, in partnership with VOSA (Vehicle Operators Services Agency). Brake works to stop death and injuries on UK roads and help those traumatised by road crashes. The Fleet Safety Forum is dedicated to producing independent, up-to-date information on how to manage your road risk. Subscribers to the Fleet Safety Forum receive monthly mailings including a newsletter, information sheets, posters and leaflets and discounted invitations to conferences and workshops. For further information, or to subscribe to the Fleet Safety Forum, contact Brake.

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