

Drive At Your Own Risk: Danger On America's Road

(NAPSA)—They're on highways in every state in America—the oversized boat on a trailer that's too small, the overloaded pickup with its cargo ready to topple and the rickety camper swaying across the lanes.

Some 57,000 crashes involving passenger vehicles towing trailers occur annually, according to five-year averages from the National Highway Traffic Safety Association (NHTSA). In 2003 alone, accidents with trailing vehicles resulted in 364 deaths, 14,484 injuries and 40,080 instances of property damage.

“Many trailering accidents can be prevented by having the right equipment and following basic safety measures,” said Jim Recknagel, General Manager, Automotive Group for Master Lock. “While sales of campers, boats, ATVs and motorcycles continue to rise across the country, so too will the number of accidents involving the towing of these recreational vehicles if the necessary steps to safe towing are not followed.”

A new study, “Towing Troubles: Danger on America's Road,” from Master Lock and Customer Profiles, Ltd., tracks the safety—or lack thereof—of the vehicles and trailers being towed on the roadways of America. The study found that of Americans who tow:

- 41 percent have trailer tires in only moderate or worse condition. Worn, under-inflated and dry-rotted tires can blow under highway conditions, leading to dangerous acci-



Many trailering accidents can be prevented by following basic safety measures, according to a national program.

dents. Some 40 percent of accidents involving a passenger vehicle towing a trailer are due to faulty tires.

- 55 percent have moderate, poor or extremely poor electrical systems, which means brake lights, turn signals and reverse lights, may not work properly.

- 49 percent have trailers that are not level. An unlevel trailer will reduce the driver's control of the vehicle and may cause the trailer and consequently the vehicle to fishtail.

- 51 percent do not use both pins and locks to secure towing system components.

- 44 percent do not have safety chains crisscrossed under the coupler with enough room for turns. Properly crossed safety chains form a cradle to catch a trailer if it becomes unhitched and prevent it from falling onto the road where it can cause severe vehicle and trailer damage as well as accidents and injuries.

There is Safety in Knowing

Many accidents can be avoided by properly inspecting, maintain-

ing and replacing towing system components when needed.

- Inspect tires for wear and tear, and check the tire pressure on the tow vehicle and trailer.

- Be sure the towing system components—hitch, ball mount, hitch ball, coupler and safety chains—are properly secured and adjusted.

- Check that the trailer is level. Be sure weight levels are appropriate for the towing system. Measure Gross Trailer Weight (trailer and cargo) on a public vehicle scale. Measure Tongue Weight (amount of pressure the coupler exerts on the hitch ball) with a bathroom scale or trailer tongue weight scale. The TW should be no more than 10 percent of the GTW.

- Check the wiring system to make sure all running lights, brake lights, turn signals and hazard lights are working.

- Frequently change engine and transmission oils and filters, lubricate components and check the cooling system.

- Have the brakes inspected regularly on both vehicles. Be sure that necessary adjustments are made and any damaged or worn parts are replaced.

- If the towing system is more than 5 years old, regularly pulls heavy loads or is exposed to salt air and harsh weather, consider upgrading the towing system.

For more information on safe towing tips, visit www.masterlock.com.