

TRAILER SAFETY INDUSTRY COALITION

"Committed to Trailer Safety"

SAFETY TIP #2

Trailers: A Word About Safety

The Trailer Safety Industry Coalition (TSIC) is a coalition of trailer and component manufacturers formed to identify and address issues that can improve the safety of towable equipment. The TSIC is developing a series of safety tips to assist consumers in maintaining their towable equipment.

Trailer Tire Information

Trailer tires may be worn out even though they still have plenty of tread left. This is because trailer tires have to carry a lot of weight all the time, even when not in use. It is actually better for the tire to be rolling down the road than to be idle. During use, the tire releases lubricants that are beneficial to tire life. Using the trailer tires often also helps prevent flat spots from developing.

The main cause of tire failure is improper inflation. Always check the cold tire inflation pressures before each trip and at least once a week during the trip for proper inflation levels. "Cold" means that the tires are at the same temperature as the surrounding air, such as when the vehicle has been parked overnight. Wheel and tire manufacturers recommend adjusting the air pressure to the trailer manufacturer's recommended cold inflation pressure, in pounds per square inch (PSI) stated on the vehicle's Federal Certification Label or Tire Placard when the trailer is loaded. Never load a trailer to a weight greater than its gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR). If the tires are inflated to less than the recommended inflation level or the GVWR of the trailer is exceeded, the ability of the tires to safely carry the load could be dramatically affected. If the tires are inflated to more than the recommended inflation level, handling characteristics of the tow vehicle/trailer combination could be affected. Refer to the owner's manual or talk to your dealer or vehicle manufacturer if you have any questions regarding proper inflation practices.

Tires can lose air over a period of time. In fact, tires can lose 1 to 3 PSI per month. This is because molecules of air, under pressure, migrate through the rubber from the inside to the outside. A drop in tire pressure could cause the tire to become overloaded, leading to excessive heat build up. If a trailer tire is under-inflated, even for a short period of time, the tire could suffer internal damage.

High speed towing in hot conditions degrades trailer tires significantly. As heat builds up during driving, the tire's internal structure starts to break down, compromising the strength of the tire. It is recommended to drive at moderate speeds.

Statistics indicate the average life of a trailer tire is about five years under normal use and maintenance conditions. After three years, replacing the trailer tires with new ones should be considered, even if the tires have adequate tread depth. Some experts claim that after five years, trailer tires have degraded to the point that they are considered worn out and should be replaced, even if they have had minimal or no use. This is such a general statement that it may not apply in all cases. It is best to have your tires inspected by a tire supplier to determine if your tires need to be replaced.

If you are storing your trailer for an extended period, make sure the tires are fully inflated to the maximum rated pressure and that you store them in a cool, dry place, such as a garage. Use tire covers to protect the trailer tires from the harsh effects of the sun. It is also a good idea to place a barrier between the trailer tires and a concrete or asphalt surface it is parked on. A thick garbage bag, a piece of carpet or a piece of plywood will do the job. This will prevent possible tire damage from chemicals in the parking surface.

You can learn more about TSIC's efforts, and recommended practices at www.natm.com, www.rvia.org, www.nmma.org, and www.ntea.com. Feel free to contact us so that we may continue this dialogue. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) also publishes brochures providing guidelines for safely towing trailers such as "Towing a Trailer" and "Safety Tips for Driving with a Trailer." These and other publications are available at the www.nhtsa.dot.gov website.