

Inspection of couplings for dog trailers, pig trailers and road train dollies

Background

This safety alert has been issued by the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (NHVR) following a safety issue identified to the NHVR by investigators examining a fatal fuel tanker crash in country Victoria on 7 August 2014.

While the investigation continues, the NHVR wishes to communicate early observations. This information is provided without comment as to any contributory cause to the collision.

The frontline investigation is being performed by Victoria Police, who are maintaining close liaison with the NHVR and the Victorian Transport Industry Enforcement Liaison Committee.

The facts

- › The heavy vehicle involved in the collision was a rigid tanker truck towing a four axle dog tanker trailer.
- › The coupling between the towing truck and trailer failed resulting in separation of the trailing unit from the towing truck.
- › The trailer was connected to the towing truck by a tow eye bolt, which connected to an auto-tow coupler on the truck.
- › This is a common arrangement in many heavy trailers and road train dollies.
- › Investigators have established that, in this case, the thread on the nut and the rear of the bolt has failed.
- › The tow eye bolt has pulled out from the tow eye housing (block) on the drawbar of the trailer.

What you should do

The drawbar, tow eye and auto-coupler are safety-critical components of these types of heavy vehicle combinations.

If you operate a dog trailer, pig trailer or road train dolly fitted with these types of coupling, you are advised to inspect the coupling systems to ensure their integrity, with a particular focus on the tow eye fitment.

- › Consider whether your maintenance system will detect any looseness in the fitting of a tow eye.
- › This component is not easily tested by hand and any looseness may not be visible when a trailer is stationary after braking.

You may also wish to take the opportunity to:

- › review how your inspection system detects other possible issues, such as cracks in the tow eye housing (block) or any kinks or cracks in the drawbar.
- › consider whether you would voluntarily fit supplementary chains (safety chains) to heavy trailer drawbars.

Any supplementary chains should be installed by a qualified person and must be properly maintained and secured when in service.

Further guidance

- › Operators should follow manufacturer guidelines in conducting these inspections and maintenance checks.
- › Those installing these types of coupling should reference the requirements for fitment in the [Heavy Vehicle \(Vehicle Standards\) National Regulation](#) and [Vehicle Standards Bulletin 6](#).
- › Those inspecting these types of coupling should reference the [National Heavy Vehicle Inspection Manual](#) for guidance.
- › The [National Heavy Vehicle Inspection Manual](#) has information relating to safety chains for heavy vehicles.

Acknowledgement

The NHVR acknowledges the support of Victoria Police and the Victorian Transport Industry Enforcement Liaison Committee in preparing this safety alert. The Committee comprises Victoria Police, VicRoads, Work Safe Victoria, Victoria Transport Association and Transport Workers Union (Victorian Branch).

Disclaimer

This information is provided without comment as to any contributory cause to the collision.

For more information

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*Standard 1300 call charges apply. Please check with your phone provider.



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