

# Load Security Information Series - The Basics of Vehicle Load Security

This sheet gives basic information on securing loads on or in vehicles driven on the road. In this context, the term 'load' means any objects, tools, equipment, goods or cargo. The information is aimed at anyone who transports loads in any type of vehicle for work purposes.



## Introduction

Loads carried in **any** vehicle, whether a motorbike, car, van, lorry, truck or trailer, should be secured so that they cannot move or fall off or out of the vehicle. Loose items such as a computer laptop on the rear car seat or tools in a vehicle cab are all potential missiles especially in a collision and can cause serious injury to the vehicle occupants, other road users and pedestrians. Loads must be secured even if the vehicle is only travelling a short distance or at low speeds.

## What is Load Security?

Load security is a term used to cover load restraint and load containment.

- **Load restraint** means preventing the movement of the load in any direction in relation to the vehicle load bed.
- **Load containment** means preventing goods falling from the vehicle.

Unsecured loads can move in any direction (forward, backwards, sideways and even upwards). The weight of the load and the friction between the load and the vehicle are never enough to keep the load in place. Unsecured loads may become unstable during a journey and fall from a vehicle during unloading.

Loads must be secured so that they are unlikely to shift, fall, be

dislodged or blown from the vehicle both during the journey and when the vehicle is being unloaded.

## Why should loads be secured?

Unsecured or inadequately secured loads can injure and even kill people. Failure to secure a load properly can also result in financial losses due to damaged goods, vehicles, property and roads. Financial losses may also result from lost working time, clean up costs, time delays during unloading, legal costs and damage to company reputation.

Loads that are unsecured or inadequately secured often begin to move when the driver is accelerating, braking, going around corners or roundabouts, entering or exiting motorway slip roads or taking evasive action such as avoiding a collision. Sudden steering movements can also cause the load to move. Loads can move even at low speeds.

Drivers, vehicle occupants, other road users, pedestrians and anyone who may be involved in loading and unloading the vehicle may be at risk of injury.

- As well as being a distraction to the driver, shifting loads can make the vehicle unstable, result in loss of control of the vehicle and may cause the vehicle to overturn.
- Unsecured loads or objects may fall on or hit people and can cause road obstructions, traffic disruptions and collisions especially if drivers swerve to avoid fallen items.

- Certain vehicle spillages may cause other vehicles to skid and lose control.
- Unrestrained goods may crash into the vehicle cab during emergency braking.
- Loads which have shifted may have to be manually removed from the vehicle which may increase the risk of an injury or a fall from the vehicle.

## What Law applies to Load Security?

Load security is covered specifically by Road Traffic legislation, which requires that loads carried by vehicles must be properly secured at all times. It is an offence for a vehicle to be overloaded or to discharge material onto the public road.

Occupational Health and Safety legislation is also applicable to load security. Under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 (No.10 of 2005):

- Employers must ensure systems of work are planned, performed and maintained for securing and transporting loads.
- Drivers, loading and unloading staff must also be provided with instruction, information and training about securing loads.
- Employers must ensure that adequate equipment is provided and maintained for securing loads.
- Appropriate plans and procedures must also be in place in the event of an emergency such as a load shifting.

The law also requires that employers co-operate, so where several parties are involved in ensuring the safe transport of a load, there should be adequate co-ordination and co-operation between the parties and clear responsibilities laid down.



## Who is responsible for securing loads?

Load security is not the sole responsibility of the vehicle driver. Everyone has a role to play in ensuring that loads are transported safely.

- **Employers:** Must ensure that the vehicle is safe and suitable for the load being carried. They must also ensure that safe systems of work are in place for securing loads, that staff are trained and that during load securing the risk of people falling from the vehicle or suffering an injury is avoided or minimised.
- **Vehicle Owners:** If the vehicle is leased or rented, the company that owns the vehicle has a responsibility to ensure that the vehicle is safe and fit for purpose.
- **Loading & Unloading Staff:** Must be trained how to secure loads and competent to load and unload the vehicle safely.
- **The Driver:** On the road, the driver is responsible for the load so the driver should know how the vehicle has been loaded and how the load is secured. While carrying out the journey, the driver should check that the load is secure at regular intervals as the load may settle or move during the journey.

## What do I use to secure loads?

Different loads will require different methods of securing for example, fastening straps, chains, adjustable brackets, sliding slatboards, use of dunnage, blocking or bracing. However, what works for one type of load will not necessarily work for another type. The vehicle must always be appropriate to carry the load and have suitable attachment points for chains, straps and other load securing devices. Whatever system is used it must not create an additional risk for people who have to use it. Carry out a risk assessment and select the safest and most appropriate method of securing the load. Consult the vehicle manufacturer, trade industry bodies and suppliers of proprietary load security systems who will be able to provide advice.

## Where can I get further information?

- Visit [www.hsa.ie](http://www.hsa.ie) for information on occupational health and safety or contact the Workplace Contact Unit at [wcu@hsa.ie](mailto:wcu@hsa.ie) or **1890 289 389**.
- For information on Road Safety visit [www.rsa.ie](http://www.rsa.ie) and [www.garda.ie](http://www.garda.ie)