**Drivers – Make sure your load is safe**

A cartoon of a truck carrying boxes

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

**Make sure your load is safe**

As an at-work driver you may load your own vehicle, or perhaps you are given a trailer which has been loaded by depot staff. Either way, it is your responsibility as well as your employer’s, to ensure that the load is safe, properly distributed and properly secured.

A cartoon of a van with boxes inside

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

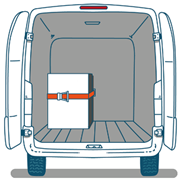
**What does this mean?**

Everything within your vehicle is essentially part of the load, whether that’s your lunchbox, your fire extinguisher, your tools or freight. If it’s been put in the vehicle, it needs to be in an appropriate place and secured well enough that it will not move or fall out, even if other things are moved around it.

There is plenty of more detailed guidance on this, including [load safety guidance](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/securing-loads-on-hgvs-and-goods-vehicles/1-responsibility-for-load-security) from the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA).

If you drive a van, ensure that you use the racking and attachment points correctly to store and lash down any objects in the load bay, and that loose items in the cab are also secured so they cannot move as the vehicle moves.

Open-backed vehicles, such as flatbeds and pickups, often have insecure loads. It’s tempting to do the job, throw equipment or materials back into the load bed, and leave. However, it is very important that everything is strapped down and sheeted. Ropes, straps and other restraints should also be secured so they do not fly free off the vehicle. Check your load frequently within a panel van, to ensure loads have not moved in transit between deliveries and have remained in place, securely.



**Training**

Your employer should give you training on how to secure loads correctly and if they don’t, make sure you request it. A lot of hand, arm and shoulder injuries are caused by the improper use of straps, nets and curtains.

Also, insecure loads can fall on you or others, or fall out of the vehicle while it is in motion, at which point they become a lethal hazard to you and other road users.

**Why is load safety important?**

* Objects within a vehicle are subject to inertia – in other words when the vehicle moves forwards, they can shift backwards, and when the vehicle brakes, those objects will continue moving forwards at the previous speed – *unless* they are properly secured. That can mean they may be flying through the air at your head, out the back of the vehicle onto the vehicle behind, or even tumbling sideways through a curtain-sided HGV.
* A 1kg hammer which has been travelling in a load bed at 30mph will continue with a momentum of 13.5 metres per second when the vehicle brakes hard – so even small items are potentially fatal weapons. Momentum is mass times velocity, so imagine how lethal even light items can be if they move within your vehicle, or bounce off it.
* Every day things fall off commercial vehicles and onto the road network. In 2022, over [62,000 items](https://www.directlinegroup.co.uk/en/news/brand-news/2023/20072023.html) were collected from UK motorways and major A roads. Everything from glazed doors to washing machines to ships’ masts have toppled onto carriageways – some of which sounds comical until you consider the danger that poses to the vehicles which suddenly encounter them. Even small items are really dangerous on the road because they become missiles when struck at force by an oncoming vehicle.
* Loads which shift within the vehicle affect its handling. The vehicle’s centre of gravity changes, and it will become less responsive and far less stable.
* Insecure loads are also dangerous for you and those around you when you stop. If things have moved inside your load area, then they can fall out when you open the doors, or fall when you move something near to them.

**Penalties**

[The law](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/securing-loads-on-hgvs-and-goods-vehicles/1-responsibility-for-load-security) says that any load which could pose a danger to anyone – including you – is illegal. That means that you can be stopped and potentially prosecuted for dangerous driving. You may be given points on your licence or prosecuted with an unlimited fine. This can apply to insecure items with the potential to fall, even if they haven’t.

Enforcement officers can also apply an immediate prohibition to your vehicle, meaning it cannot continue its journey.

**Who is responsible?**

Everyone involved in loading the vehicle or driving it is responsible for its safety. The fleet operator, the freight owner, the fork-lift operator - all have responsibility for making sure that freight is secure and safe. However, before you start the engine **you must be confident that the load is secure** – and if it isn’t, report it back to those who loaded the vehicle for them to rectify it.

If you didn’t load the vehicle yourself, ask for a load plan from the consignor (freight loader or owner). This should include:

* the weight
* where it has been placed
* instructions and precautions for removal
* a photo of the secured load with date and time

You must feel empowered to question the loading procedure and refuse the load until you are satisfied, because it’s your safety and licence that is on the line.