

Safety Alert – June 2022

Subject: Boat trailer disconnection

UNSW Safety is issuing a Safety Alert to remind staff and students about the risk of trailers becoming detached from vehicles if the connection apparatus is not correctly secured.

Background:

During a field trip, a 5-metre boat was being towed from Nelson Bay back to Sydney using a Toyota Hilux, when the boat trailer became detached from the vehicle on a downhill slope and ran into the back of the vehicle. This caused damage to the tailgate and back window of the vehicle.

The investigation identified:

- Fatigue, travel time pressures, workload and road and environmental conditions were considered, but ruled out as being the cause
- It was likely that the cause of the incident was that a pin wasn't inserted correctly into the coupling latch to lock in the connection mechanism for the trailer
- The driver had correctly attached the safety chains which prevented the trailer running away from the vehicle
- The driver and passenger in the vehicle had completed induction and training on the trailer and vehicle
- Hi-vis vests were not worn when the driver and passenger got out of the vehicle to examine the damage, and safety triangles were not placed by the car to alert other road users



Actions taken following the incident:

- The driver of the vehicle called several colleagues to confirm whether the vehicle was still safe to operate
- The trailer was lifted back onto the tow ball and connected with the safety pin in the coupling latch

- Broken glass was cleaned off the road and the lighting functions on the trailer were tested
- The vehicle and trailer were then taken to a nearby Fisheries technician to ensure that the vehicle and boat were safe to drive back to Sydney
- The vehicle, trailer and boat were driven back to Sydney without further incident
- The drivers were re-trained in the use of the trailer
- Stickers have been designed to attach to each boat trailer as a visual reminder for relevant safety checks to be completed prior to use
- The Risk Management Form has been updated to identify the risk associated with not inserting the safety pin into the coupling latch of the trailer

What is recommended going forward:

- Users must ensure that the coupling latch between the trailer and vehicle is securely connected prior to operating the vehicle
- Having a visual prompt on the trailer such as a sticker or checklist, or a cross-checking process by a second person will reduce the risk of an error being made
- All users should be trained in how to correctly attach the vehicle to the trailer
- The process for calling roadside assistance for damage or repairs should be clearly explained

•