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TOWING TROUBLES: DANGER ON AMERICA'S ROAD

New Study of Americans Who Tow Finds Many Lack Recommended Safety Precautions While Towing Accidents, Deaths are on the Rise

MILWAUKEE (August 25, 2005) -- You've seen them on the highway -- the oversized boat on a too-small trailer, the overloaded pickup with its cargo ready to topple into the roadway and the rickety camper swaying across the lanes. But did you know the danger they present to motorists around them? Or that many of the Americans who tow don't follow recommended safety precautions?

A new study, "**Towing Troubles: Danger on America's Road**", from Customer Profiles, Ltd., and Master Lock, tracks the safety – or lack thereof – of the vehicles and trailers being towed on the roadways of America. While sales of campers, boats, ATVs and motorcycles are all on the rise, so are accidents involving the towing of these recreational vehicles.

Some 57,000 crashes involving passenger vehicles towing trailers occur annually, according to five-year averages of accident analysis by the National Highway Traffic Safety Association. In 2003 alone, accidents with trailing vehicles resulted in 364 deaths, 14,484 injuries and 40,080 instances of property damage. Both the numbers of deaths and property damages increased in 2003 from the previous year.

The primary dangers on the roadways include towed trailers that get loose, trailers that sway and cause the towing vehicle to lose control, trailers that blow tires and cause the towing vehicle to wreck and improperly tied-down cargo that breaks loose and falls into the roadway, causing accidents for other motorists.

According to Sherline Products Inc., which manufactures trailer tongue weight scales for the towing industry, a customer reported this harrowing experience: "I had a small travel trailer and loaded a number of heavy 5-gallon drinking water bottles in the very back where they would be out of the way during a trip," he said. "After speeding up to pass a truck, I pulled back into my lane and the trailer went into an uncontrollable oscillation. My family was terrified as the car and trailer pitched from one shoulder to the other. I was very lucky to regain control before the rig flipped or went head-on into another vehicle. I just didn't know how dangerous it was or how to load the trailer correctly."

Many Americans Don't Know How to Tow

The study, which included more than 500 safety inspections of campers, boating trailers and RVs around the country, found that many Americans who tow don't follow recommended safety precautions and don't properly prepare their towing vehicles before they hit the road. Key findings include:

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- A majority (51%) of Americans who tow campers, boats or trailers with ATVs/jet skis/motorcycles do not use the recommended security methods of a locking device for their coupler and hitch.
- Nearly 50 percent (48%) of respondents towing boats use only a non-locking receiver pin to connect their trailer, which is susceptible to tampering.
- Respondents towing campers had the best approach to safety, with 69 percent using both locks and pins to secure their vehicles, 69 percent using weight distribution systems, 71 percent using appropriately crossed security chains and 52 percent having a properly leveled trailer.
- Nearly 50 percent (47%) of those towing boats didn't properly cross their safety chains under the coupler. Properly crossed safety chains form a cradle to catch a trailer if it becomes unhitched and prevent it from falling onto the road where it can cause severe vehicle and trailer damage as well as accidents and injuries.
- A majority of respondents towing boats or ATVs/jet skis/motorcycles achieved a moderate or worse ranking on the levelness of their trailer. For ATVs/jet skis/motorcycles, 15 percent were ranked poor or extremely poor. An unlevelled trailer will reduce the driver's control of the vehicle and may cause the trailer and consequently the vehicle to fishtail.
- More than 50 percent (53%) of towing vehicles and trailers received only moderate or poor rankings on their electrical systems, which means that brake lights, turn signals and reverse lights may not work properly. Additionally, frayed and exposed wires pose a significant danger. Boat trailers presented the greatest danger, with 17 percent of their electrical systems in poor or extremely poor condition.
- Trailer tires are one of the biggest dangers on the road, with 41 percent of tires in only moderate or worse condition. Some 10 percent of boat trailers had tires in poor or extremely poor condition. Worn, under-inflated and dry-rotted tires can blow under highway conditions, leading to dangerous accidents. Forty percent of accidents involving a passenger vehicle towing a trailer are due to faulty tires.

Cargo strapped to vehicles also is an issue. From items carried in the back of pickups to coolers latched to the back of campers to luggage on the top of the family minivan, carrying cargo requires properly placed tie-downs and high-quality bungee cords.

- Security of cargo on the trailers also is an issue, with more than 54 percent of campers, 28 percent of ATVs/jet skis/motorcycles and 49 percent of boats ranking as moderate or worse in their cargo security.
- The security of additional cargo – loaded in the boats or campers – was a significant issue, with 32 percent of respondents ranking moderate and 40 percent ranking poor or extremely poor. This means coolers, lawn chairs, bicycles, and other typical cargo could easily fall into the path of an oncoming car.
- The condition of bungee cords was a major issue – while 56 percent were in excellent condition and properly located to hold the cargo, 44 percent were in moderate or poor condition and improperly located – meaning cords could easily snap or come unhooked and release cargo onto the roadway.

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- Ratchet tie-downs were a problem for 39 percent of respondents, as those towing boats or ATVs/jet skis/motorcycles received moderate or worse marks for the condition and location of the tie-downs securing their cargo.

The "**Towing Troubles**" study was conducted with a representative sample of 523 respondents. Master Lock Tow Pros conducted inspections of vehicles towing a trailer, camper, or other items at NASCAR facilities, campgrounds, and boating destinations in June and July 2005. A copy of the inspection checklist was provided to the vehicle owner with safety recommendations.

About Master Lock

Master Lock is the leader in towing innovation and is the world's largest manufacturer of padlocks and related security products for automotive and outdoor needs, home and yard, contractors, campus, power sports and bike needs.

Master Lock Company is an operating unit of Fortune Brands, Inc., a leading consumer brands company with annual sales exceeding \$7 billion. Headquartered in Lincolnshire, Ill., Fortune Brands (NYSE: FO), is included in the S&P 500 Index.

For more information on Master Lock products and more safe towing and cargo tips, visit www.masterlock.com.

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