

Checking for Pins

Robert Huff

Delaware Department of Agriculture



Have you ever gone to use a shared piece of equipment to find that there are safety hairpin cotters or lock pins missing from various hitch pins, jack arms, safety braces or other pieces of equipment? Generally, what have you done in this situation? Have you shrugged your shoulders, just ignored the missing pin and gone about your day using that piece of equipment anyway?

Hopefully not... Whenever taking out a trailer, prover, truck slip-on or other piece of equipment, you must do a pre-check to make sure that all safety devices are in place and don't just assume that if you used it yesterday that everything is still in place. Employees have been known to take pins from one trailer to complete their own trailer and it may put you in a compromising situation.

Over the years, I have found trailers missing large lock bars for fuel provers, entire hitch pins completely missing from jack arms (luckily the jack arm was still attached to this trailer) and other stories of inspectors having trailers come completely off the hitch ball while traveling. These oversites are accidents waiting to happen that have the potential to take a life. That simple lock bar that is missing a hairpin cotter can work its way loose, fall off the trailer, bounce on the roadway and strike a pedestrian or hit an oncoming vehicle. If you are traveling at 50 mph and the lock bar strikes a car traveling at 50 mph in the opposite direction, imagine the results, especially if the other vehicle is a motorcycle. Or imagine an entire oil prover jack arm falling off in the middle of a busy interstate.

You are responsible for the equipment you use, and you need to protect not only yourself, but the others around you. If by chance you lose a hairpin or lock pin while doing your inspections, try using a simple large paperclip, nail, or bolt to get you to a safe location until you can get a proper replacement. (Note: paperclips and nails must be bent to prevent them from easily sliding out and bolts will need to have a nut and possibly washers to prevent them from sliding out). It would be a good idea to supply all individuals using the equipment, spare pins to keep in their vehicle just for this reason.

Instructors need to stress to employees that pull trailers, the difference in ball sizes from 1 7/8", 2" or 2 5/16". The average trailer uses a 2" ball, but occasionally larger trailers will use a 2 5/16" ball. If your employee is unaware or hasn't been fully trained and uses a 2" ball for a trailer requiring a 2 5/16", you can expect to have that trailer fall off the back of the vehicle at some point and depending on if the safety chains are properly attached, you could have a runaway trailer. This I cannot stress enough... review, review, review and drill it to your trainees or even your co-workers so that they know the difference. Many times, a trainee will say "I've been pulling trailers for years", but yet they don't fully grasp the difference or in a rush they overlook that they are using the wrong size ball. Don't let them or potentially yourself be the person that we see on the news that has an accident that was fully preventable.

Safety sometimes gets lost with routine. You've hooked that trailer a thousand times in your career and become so comfortable that it becomes second nature, but because of that, you may tend to disregard a safety check which then puts you and the public at risk. Check the brake lights, the turn signals, the running lights, the safety chains, the right size ball and especially check those safety pins.