



On the move: keep scaffold secure and know your weight limits

Having an overloaded scaffold lorry with unsecured boards and poles is not only dangerous but could catch the eye of the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency and result in a fine, or worse, your operator's licence being revoked. **Hedy Aghdam**, from transport management consultancy GVL Management Limited, explains what to expect if you're pulled over for a roadside inspection.



What mistakes do scaffolders commonly make with load securing?

When a scaffolder was recently stopped by the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) on the suspicion of having an 'overloaded' lorry, his vehicle was taken to its test centre over the weighbridge. Although the lorry was within the weight limit, the back axle was overloaded, the boards were insecure and loose tubes were rolling around. After spreading the weight by moving some of the load to the middle, and getting a slap on the wrist, the scaffolder was sent on his way.

Assessing load security

The DVSA has produced enforcement guidance to assist examiners in assessing load securing methods. Initially, DVSA examiners carry out an assessment for the adequacy of loads secured on vehicles using a flow chart. If the load is unstable or the securing of equipment is in poor condition, the next question will be raised. Does the vehicle present an immediate likelihood of causing injury due to its load security?

If the answer is yes, a DVSA examiner will apply enforcement action and a range of regulatory powers, including prohibiting the

continued use of the vehicle.

If the answer is no, then minor issues in how the vehicles are loaded and secured can be dealt with through advice or fixed penalty notices. (As of 29 January, drivers can pay fixed penalty notices at the roadside using the DVSA's new secure online service.)

Even though the DVSA examiner had let the scaffolder go on his way in the case described, a few weeks later, the company received a spontaneous visit from the DVSA, wanting to inspect the vehicles and maintenance records using the Operator Compliance Risk Score (OCRS) system. The DVSA uses the OCRS system to decide which vehicles should be inspected and then calculate the risk of an operator not following the safety rules or the rules on roadworthiness. The system is based on data from annual tests, roadside inspections and inspections at operator's premises. The higher the OCRS scores are, the higher the risk an operator becomes.

An operator's licence – it's all about trust

In similar situations, vehicle operators usually see the DVSA visit as unfair. In this case, the fact that the driver was issued with a verbal warning and then received a DVSA follow-up visit may be viewed as an isolated incident. However, the granting of an operator's licence is based on the trust that the operator is going to be compliant with rules and regulations. Still, this does not mean that operators are immune to future actions by the DVSA. In severe cases, operators may be asked to attend a Public Inquiry and risk their licence being revoked, curtailed or suspended.

In most cases, the cost of a single roadside inspection by the DVSA is considerable. A roadside inspection of an unsecured load can lead to the DVSA asking operators for access to their records, such as maintenance, working time and tachograph, in order to verify the operator's compliance.

Since driving is not usually a scaffolder's main job, many scaffolders can fail to recognise the legal requirements of operating. These legal requirements include keeping proper vehicle and driver records as well as using a tachograph to record their duties. The failure to do so can result in a warning against the operator's licence by the traffic commissioner, which can be a costly mistake.

Taking steps to address the risks associated with load securing and obtaining a good understanding of it are critical parts of a scaffolder's responsibilities, both as a licence holder and as a driver. Loading the vehicle properly and using adequate load restraint, not only stops danger to road users but can also save businesses a significant amount of money and time.

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