

## 2006 TOWING TROUBLES: DANGER ON AMERICA'S ROADS

*2<sup>ND</sup> Annual Study of Americans Who Tow Finds Most Ill-Informed On Safe Towing Practices While Towing Accidents Rise Nearly 20 Percent*

**MILWAUKEE, Wis. (June 29, 2006)** – It's vacation season, with thousands of drivers pulling onto the highways for a quintessential all-American car trip. Many are pulling a boat, camper or trailer. But do they really know what they're doing with that rickety camper, the oversized boat on a too-small trailer, the overloaded pick-up with cargo ready to roll off into the road? How safe are the highways this summer?

New 2006 results from the second annual study, "**Towing Troubles: Danger on America's Road**", from Customer Profiles, Ltd., and Master Lock, show an alarming number of trailer owners have had little or no training in proper and safe towing procedures. The first study revealed that the majority of trailer owners don't follow recommended precautions and are not towing safely. At the same time, as sales of boats, campers and ATVs rise, accidents and injuries involving trailers are also rising dramatically.

More than 65,000 crashes involving passenger vehicles towing trailers occurred in 2004, jumping nearly 20 percent from the previous year, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Association. In 2004 alone, accidents of vehicles with a trailing unit resulted in 422 deaths, 27,232 injuries and 46,737 instances of property damage only. The number of accidents, accidents that caused injuries and property damage all increased by approximately 20 percent in 2004 from the previous year.

In year two of Master Lock's annual "**Towing Troubles: Danger on America's Road**" safety study, the company sought to look beyond the fact that Americans aren't towing safely and look at the reasons why. How much do they think they know about safe towing, and how much do they really know? Where did they learn proper safety procedures, if at all? What kind of information was provided by the dealer or salesman? If they bought a used trailer, where else would they go to find out how to tow it properly and safely? Exploring these questions allowed Master Lock to layer the results on top of their existing research to form an even more in-depth picture of the issue of towing safety.

"I tow a lot of different things and I'm concerned when I see trailers on the road that are not loaded properly, not hooked up right or not level," said Jeremy Mayfield, Master Lock spokesman and NASCAR Nextel Cup Series driver of the No. 19 Dodge Dealers/UAW Dodge Charger. "This causes a potentially very dangerous situation for the driver and passengers as well as other motorists. Master Lock's towing research and public safety education campaign really help to teach trailer owners what they need to do to keep everyone safe."

### **Most Trailer Owners Don't Get the Information They Need**

The study, which included more than 300 online surveys with trailer owners around the country, found that most are lacking in knowledge of basic safety and proper towing procedures, and few have had any real training or instruction. However, the majority of owners think they know what they're doing. Key findings include:

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- The vast majority of Americans who tow (71%) admitted to being only somewhat to not knowledgeable about proper towing practices and safety, and nearly one third of trailer owners (29%) admitted to having limited or no knowledge at all.
- The majority (57%) did not know or were uncertain of their Gross Trailer Weight, crucial to selecting the proper towing system components, such as class of trailer hitch, and ensuring the correct tow vehicle type to pull the trailer. More than half (54%) did not know or were uncertain of the class of trailer hitch on their vehicle.
- Three quarters (75%) admitted that a main source for information on towing practices and safety was simply past experience with a trailer, in other words trial and error. Guessing is absolutely not the best or safest way to learn proper towing practices. Less than one quarter turned to the trailer owner's manual (24%).
- Only one in 10 (13%) received towing information from either the boat dealer or trailer dealer – professionals who would be an expected information source. Interestingly, boat owners were less likely to receive information from their boat or trailer dealer than owners of smaller recreational vehicles, although boats are larger, heavier and towed by more people.
- Although less than one third (29%) of trailer owners feel they are very knowledgeable, nearly two thirds or 63 percent said they did not need any further information on safe towing procedures. This troubling disconnect reveals a significant lack of understanding of the risks of unsafe towing. Owners mistakenly believed they were already towing safely (yet 2005 research shows they are not!)
  - Only one in 10 was interested in additional information on weight distribution (13%) which affects the levelness and control of the trailer. Even fewer, only one in twenty (5%), wanted information about key safety issues such as leveling the trailer. Towing more than one trailer or different weights or cargo can make it difficult to keep the trailer level and many respondents owned more than one boat or towed item. An unlevelled trailer is at risk to fishtail and can cause the driver to lose control of the tow vehicle.
  - Use of safety chains, vehicle requirements, locking the trailer and securing cargo – also key safety issues – also received little interest from trailer owners. 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 accidents and injuries. 2005 research showed that less than half (47%) properly cross their safety chains.

### **Are Professionals Helping or Hurting?**

- Of the nearly half (40%) of trailer owners who bought from a retail outlet or dealer, only half of those were instructed on key safety practices. This means that barely 20 percent of the total trailer owners received any professional instruction in proper towing and safety procedures.
- Nearly a third of those who purchased at retail/dealer (31%) were told nothing about towing practices and safety issues.

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- Most owners have never received any professional information regarding trailer security or how to protect their purchase. Less than half of retail/dealer purchasers (47%) or 19 percent of total owners were told how to lock the trailer when hitched and even fewer, only 43 percent of purchasers or 17 percent of total owners have been instructed on how to lock the trailer when unhitched. An unlocked trailer can easily be re-hitched to a thief's vehicle and towed away, never to be seen again.

### **Accidents on the Rise**

- More than one in five trailer owners (21%) have experienced a safety incident, from fishtailing, loss of control and tire blow outs to a trailer that came loose or loss of cargo.
- Nationally, 27 percent of towing accidents result in injuries and 72 percent sustain property damage only. One third (33%) of survey respondents who experienced an accident felt it could have been avoided if they were more aware of safe towing practices.
- Nearly 10 percent of owners experienced a theft or attempted theft of items on the trailer or the entire trailer and cargo. Expanded knowledge of trailer and cargo security can prevent theft of the trailer and make cargo that much more secure, yet few owners were interested in information about locking the trailer when unhitched (7%), locking when hitched (5%) or securing cargo (6%).

### **Promoting Safe Towing**

Master Lock, the leader in innovative towing systems and solutions, is committed to the issue of safe towing and helping to educate Americans on the risks of towing unsafely and on safe towing procedures. Primary dangers of unsafe towing include trailers getting loose, trailers that sway or fishtail and cause the driver to lose control, trailer 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.

Master Lock's annual Towing Troubles research on how Americans tow, knowledge of towing practices, and safe towing tips are located at [www.towingtroubles.com](http://www.towingtroubles.com). For more information on Master Lock towing systems and products, please visit [www.masterlock.com](http://www.masterlock.com).

### **About Master Lock**

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

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