



SAFE and SOUND?

Prohibition notices are still being served for insecure loads, despite the rise of EN 12642-XL certified curtainsiders. Steve Banner examines the issues and warns operators that the European standard is not a simple fix

Despite being deluged with advice on how best to contain their cargos, curtainsider operators still find themselves served with prohibition notices for insecure loads. And the degree of insecurity is sometimes blatantly obvious.

If a curtain is bulging and ready to burst, then clearly the cargo has shifted and is dangerous. Quite apart from the

possibility that it will penetrate the curtains and crash on to the carriageway while the vehicle is in motion, there is also the risk that it may fall on somebody when it is being unloaded.

One reason for lapses with cargo restraints may be a basic failure to appreciate the design intent of the increasingly widespread European standard EN 12642-XL for curtainsiders. As Ray Engley, head of technical

services at the RHA (Road Haulage Association), puts it: "A lot of people simply don't understand it."

Richard Owens, marketing manager of Teardrop trailer maker Don-Bur, adds: "In some cases, it is wrongly treated as a 'get out of jail free' card - meaning cargo doesn't need to be secured at all. I'm sure there are operators out there who would just buy an EN sticker and slap it on one of their bodies if they thought they could get away with it."

But curtainsider bodies constructed to the non-mandatory EN 12642-XL standard are deemed capable of withstanding a sideways force equivalent to 50% of the maximum payload without strapping the cargo down. They also have to cope with a rearwards force of 50% of maximum payload and a 100% frontal force.

What some operators fail to appreciate, suggests Engley, is that the cargo also has to be loaded in a tightly defined way for this standard to be effective. "It's really intended for full loads," he observes.

"The load should be a uniform one," agrees FTA (Freight Transport Association) head of engineering Andy

Mair. Twenty-six identical pallet-loads of tinned tomatoes should be fine.

Eighteen pallets bearing all sorts of different items interspersed with odd bits of unpalletised cargo of varying heights and widths probably won't be.

Additionally, uniform cargos should be butted up against the headboard, packed out almost to the rear doors and no more than 80mm from the curtains. "Furthermore, if it is double-stacked and in excess of the body's sideways capacity, then it must be restrained whether it is a full-fit load or not," advises Engley. Part-loads must be restrained, regardless of whether or not the body meets EN 12642-XL, he continues.

And note, that also goes for situations where the driver started with a full-fit load but has dropped off some pallets and still has the rest on board to deliver. "Under those circumstances, the driver may have to reposition the load, secure it front and back, and strap it over the top," warns Engley.

CHAIN OF RESPONSIBILITY

Since some customers may be reluctant to offer drivers the facilities to do so, they might be well advised to think twice. "Load restraint is the duty of the entire distribution chain," insists Engley. "That includes the consignor, the haulier and the driver - and customers cannot shrug off their responsibilities."

His opinion: "If a customer refuses to allow a driver the facilities he needs and sends him away, but he subsequently tries to reposition the load at the roadside and is injured, then the customer could be liable."

But many curtainsider operators are now switching to EN 12642-XL bodies regardless of their understanding. "These days, over 60% of the curtainsider trailers we build at our Mansfield plant meet it," confirms SDC director Paul Bratton. "The extra cost depends on the length and height of

the trailer, but typically it's £500-£600."

Most of the curtainsiders Don-Bur produces are also constructed to EN 12642-XL, says Owens. "It doesn't require a major redesign," he explains. "What's required is extra strengthening in the roof plus stronger curtains."

Yet there is no lack of restraint equipment for curtainsider drivers to deploy - although Engley suggests they should receive training first. Strapping loads effectively involves paying attention to strain levels the securing points can safely withstand, as well as the condition of straps and hooks, and the force they are designed to take. For example, Ford recently took delivery of 72 Kogel 4m-high trailers to transport components around its European plants. Installed in pairs, most of their



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Andy Mair



lashing rings can withstand a 4,000kg force.

Incidentally, in cases where trailers are loaded through the roof, restraint straps should be integrated with the roof tarpaulin to ensure none hang down and get snagged when the roof is open during loading and unloading. Additionally, there is no need for curtainsider operators to worry that cargo will be damaged if it has to be strapped into position. "Wide straps and sheets are available that can spread the load," advises Mair.

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Lawrence David recently retrofitted a pillarless curtainsider trailer, in service at DS Smith Logistics, with a variety of health and safety devices, including its Strap Safe load securing system. This allows straps to be pulled down from the trailer roof, taken across the top of the load and secured to the side rave on each side without the driver having to leave the ground.

"All trailer builders offer restraint systems, so operators should consider the type they need when trailers are first specified," suggests Mair. In some cases that could mean selecting shoring poles and bars, rather than straps.

"Straps that retract into the roof space and can be pulled down by bungee cords are widely available and we can even offer a restraint solution that keeps the ratchet captive in the side rave," advises Owens. "There is no need these days to go hurling straps with a half-kilo ratchet on the end over the top of a load from one side of the trailer to the other," he winces.

It's time to debunk the myth that once you've shut the curtains everything will be fine. Hauliers that hide behind the fact that they haven't lost a load yet are dicing with death. [TE](#)