

**Trailer Towing  
Frequently Asked Questions**

**Q. What type of plate do I need on my trailer?**

ICBC will issue the correct type of plate when you insure your trailer. They will issue either a utility trailer plate or a commercial trailer plate, depending on your trailer's use, body style and weight.

**Q. What kind of trailers use a utility trailer plate?**

A utility trailer plate is used on trailers that are intended for personal use with no financial gain. They usually have a Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW) of 1400 kg or under. In most cases, this includes horse trailers, recreational trailers for travel or human accommodation, and typical small single-axle utility trailers. Some specific designs of trailers with a GVW over 1400 kg may qualify for a utility trailer plate, such as a recreational trailer (tent, camper, travel or other similar design), house trailer (designed, constructed and equipped for human habitation), or trailers designed to carry recreational equipment (such as trail bikes, snowmobiles, a boat, or a horse).

**Q. What kind of trailers use a commercial trailer plate?**

Commercial trailer plates are used on trailers that are usually over 1400 kg. The trailers may be used for financial gain or business purposes, but this is not necessary; the plate is assigned based on vehicle design use and weight alone. Examples of trailers that use commercial trailer plates are cattle trailers, auto trailers, machine trailers and possibly flat deck trailers with two or more axles.

**Q. What other differences are there between a commercial trailer plate and a utility trailer plate?**

Commercial trailer plates are not licensed with a GVW. Trailers with utility trailer plates are usually licensed with their own GVW.

Commercial trailer plates may require a Commercial Vehicle Inspection Program decal from a designated inspection facility, depending on the rate class.

Commercial trailer plates are the same size as the ones issued for cars and trucks. Utility trailer plates are small, the same size as motorcycle plates.

**Q. Does my towing unit's licensed GVW need to include the weight of the trailer too?**

When a trailer is being towed with a utility plate, the towing unit does not have to include the weight of the trailer and its load in the towing unit's own licensed GVW. When a trailer is being towed with a commercial plate, the towing unit must be licensed for the whole combination, including its current load.

**Q. At what licensed GVW do certain regulations on a motor vehicle come into force?**

When a motor vehicle is licensed over 5000 kg, it may need a National Safety Code (NSC) number, depending on its intended use and how it is licensed. A NSC number is issued to a carrier in order to keep track of its safety rating. The number may be obtained online through the Commercial Vehicle Safety and Enforcement Branch's web site at [www.th.gov.bc.ca/cvse](http://www.th.gov.bc.ca/cvse). When a NSC number is required, the NSC holder's name must be displayed on both sides of the motor vehicle at least 5 cm high and in a manner that makes that name clearly visible to the public. When a motor vehicle is licensed over 5500 kg, the vehicle must report to open inspection stations/weigh scales and the insurance validation decal must be affixed to the front licence plate. When a motor vehicle is licensed over 8200 kg, it may require a valid Commercial Vehicle Inspection Program decal from a designated inspection facility. When a motor vehicle is licensed and/or weighs over 11794 kg, Division 37 of the Motor Vehicle Act Regulations may apply with regard to hours of service, which may include the use of a logbook.

**Q. What class Driver's Licence do I need to tow a trailer?**

For trailers weighing up to 4600 kg, you need a class 4 or 5 driver's licence. If the trailer exceeds 4600 kg and is not equipped with air brakes, you must have either a restriction 20 on a class 4 or 5 driver's licence, or a class 3, 2 or 1. If you are strictly towing a house trailer, you may obtain a restriction 51 on a class 4 or 5 driver's licence.

**Q. When are brakes required on a trailer?**

Brakes are required if the trailer exceeds 1400 kg, or more than 50% of the licensed vehicle weight of the towing unit. When brakes are required, they must be on all axles and there must be an operational breakaway on the trailer in case the towing unit and trailer separate while being towed. These brakes, when applied, must be adequate to maintain control of the trailer, must not affect the direction of travel of the trailer and, where the weight of the trailer exceeds 2800 kg, must be capable of being applied by the driver of the motor vehicle towing the trailer from his or her normal seated position.

### Q. What is the maximum a trailer can weigh?

The maximum weight is determined by the weakest component, whether that is the tires, axles, brakes, hitch, or other equipment. A manufactured trailer should have a plate or sticker specifying the Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR) and Gross Axle Weight Ratings (GAWR) of that trailer. These weights must not be exceeded, nor can the rated tire capacities or any other capacities be exceeded. If a vehicle is stopped by RCMP, CVSE or other policing authority, it must be brought into compliance before proceeding

For a U-built trailer, the easiest way to determine the maximum gross vehicle weight is to check the capacity of the tires, which is usually marked on the sidewall. If the axles are stamped or tagged with a rating, this rating can also be used, but the tire size is usually the limiting factor.

For more GVWR questions, see the “GVWR FAQs” info sheet.

### Q. Can mobile home axles be used on a U-built trailer?

Yes, but certain criteria have to be met. If the trailer is licensed for or weighs more than 1400 kg, the trailer must be inspected at a designated inspection facility. The maximum GVW on a trailer with electric brakes and other mobile home components is 4600 kg, and each mobile home axle with electric brakes has a maximum capacity of 2268 kg. Trailers with three axles are still restricted to 4600 kg.

Certain modifications must be made to ensure that the mobile home axle components are safe for highway use. Limited use axle bearings must be replaced with highway/industrial type. If brakes are used, the backing plates must be a bolt-on type. All brakes must meet provincial braking standards. The tires, rims and wheels are to be of highway quality and Department Of Transport approved, such as light truck category (LT), not for “mobile home use only.” If the axles have been cut and shortened, the inspection should indicate that the modifications have not affected roadworthiness.

### Q. What equipment is required on a trailer?

All trailers require stop, turn and tail lamps, as well as a license plate lamp. A trailer also must be equipped with at least one red reflector at the rear of the trailer, either separate or incorporated into a tail lamp, that is mounted at a height of not less than 38 cm and not more than 1.83 m.

A trailer with an overall width of 2.05 m or more, or a trailer having a gross weight in excess of 1400 kg, must be equipped with at least two amber reflectors mounted on the side of the trailer near the front, two amber reflectors mounted on the side of the trailer near the end and two red reflectors mounted on the rear of the trailer.

A commercial trailer with a width of more than 2.05 m and a GVWR of more than 4536 kg must be equipped with reflective markings on the rear and side of the trailer to meet the approved standards established by the Motor Vehicle Safety Act (Canada)

and the applicable Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) standards. These federal standards are available in the “Trailers: Federal Lighting Equipment Location Requirements” handout found at Inspection Stations and other locations.

Manufactured trailers have additional federal lighting requirements listed in the same handout. Requirements may include marker lamps, clearance lamps and conspicuity treatments, such as reflective tape.

All lamps must be SAE or Department of Transport approved.

The hitch and mounting hardware must be of adequate size and capacity to fit the towing unit’s coupling device properly and to handle the weight of the trailer. The device which couples the trailer to your motor vehicle must be firmly attached to a structurally adequate integral part of the frame of each vehicle, or, where the towed vehicle is of a GVW of less than 900 kg, to a structurally adequate part of the frame of the towed vehicle. Your vehicle must be equipped and connected with an auxiliary coupling device consisting of a chain or metal cable equal in strength to the principal coupling device, unless the coupling device is a fifth wheel and a kingpin assembly is used to couple a semi trailer to a truck tractor.

### Q. How much can a motor vehicle tow?

The manufacturer usually specifies a vehicle’s towing capacity and/or total gross combination weight in the owner’s manual, usually for warranty purposes. The capacity of the hitch and mounting hardware is also important, and hitches are usually stamped with their capacity. Vehicles must have at least 1 horsepower per 150 kg of total GVW. Remember that a trailer’s hitch or tongue weight transfers weight to the towing unit that must be included in the unit’s Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR) and Gross Axle Weight Ratings (GAWR) (usually located on the door or door post of the motor vehicle). See the “GVWR FAQs” info sheet for more information. If the trailer has a commercial license plate, the towing unit must be licensed for the whole combination weight.

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#### For more information please contact:

Your local Inspection Station, Autoplan Agent, Commercial Vehicle Safety and Enforcement’s web site at [www.cvse.ca](http://www.cvse.ca), or ICBC’s web site at [www.icbc.com/](http://www.icbc.com/)

**Information on this fact sheet subject to change without notice. In the event of conflict with this Info Sheet and the Motor Vehicle Act and Regulations and the Commercial Transport Act and Regulations, the Acts and Regulations shall apply.**