

The danger of unsecured loads – Highways England reminds drivers to check before setting off this summer

More than 46,000 items were found on England's motorways and major A roads over just 10 months and Highways England traffic officers have dealt with everything from a washing machine, sofa and king size mattress to a double-glazed door, garden sheds and a ship's mast.

With the summer staycation fast approaching, there will be many more drivers with loads such as bikes and roof boxes strapped to their vehicles. So today Highways England is urging all drivers to make sure their loads are safely secured before they set off.

Apart from leaving the owners out of pocket and maybe without a tent for their camping trip, these items pose a big safety risk for other people on the road including the traffic officers who help clear them up.

Highways England Traffic Officers experience first-hand the range of items found on England's motorways and the impact they can have on drivers.

On Road Team Manager Mark Snell, who is based in Hampshire, said:

We have had fence panels, a shed, tools, tool boxes, motorcycle bags and top boxes – the whole contents on one family's top box was spread all over three lanes as they were on their way to a holiday in the West Country. "On one occasion there was a double-glazed door and windows on the slip road at junction 6 of the M3 with cars swerving around them.

Most incidents on are on the main routes, the M6 and M1, followed by the M5, M62 and M25.

On Road Team Manager Glenn Lamont, who patrols roads in Cumbria, said:

I personally have dealt with roof boxes, bicycles, sofas, LGV trailer roofs, a domestic oil tank and many other weird objects.

The most unusual item I came across was a 40ft mast off a sailing ship. It was at an angle across two lanes. We never found the owner.

But shed-loads can close a road for several hours as well as putting people at risk. So our advice is simple: Secure your load before you set out. It could prevent an accident and save lives.

Traffic officer Matthew Bradshaw, from Hampshire, said:

We once had a shed on the M27, without a scratch on it, just sat in lane 2. It was brand new and pretty massive. No-one ever claimed it. I have heard of a few sheds being found on roads before.

Matthew also had to deal with a load of timber which fell off the truck on a slip road joining the A27 just east of Portsmouth.

He said:

Fortunately the driver became aware of the problem before the rest of the load came off or before he got onto the main carriageway and no-one was hurt.

While Traffic officer Hannah Moffitt, based in the East Midlands, told how she came across a metal shed in lanes three and four on the M1 near Leicester. She said:

We never found the owner. That's the scary thing, it has fallen off and they haven't noticed.

Other items that traffic officers have had to deal with include a sofa on the M6 in the West Midlands, a washing machine in lane 2 of the M62 near junction 23, a steel chute from a cement mixer lorry on the M6 in Cumbria, near Carlisle and a king size mattress on the A3M onto the A27.

Camera footage captured the moment a piece of metal struck a road worker on the M6 after it came off a passing HGV and hit his leg. He was working on the central reservation as part of the upgrade of the motorway between junctions 13 and 15 in Staffordshire when hurt. Fortunately he did not suffer any serious injuries or broken bones.

[View video footage.](#)

Highways England figures show that there were almost 6,000 items on the carriageway of the M6 between June 2019 and April 2020.

The most items dropped on motorways were building or construction materials. Between June 2019 and April this year there were 9,576 incidents of building/construction items obstructing major roads. Meanwhile, there were 5,174 incidents of vehicle parts or accessories found over the same period and 3,383 household or garden items. The RAC, Road Haulage Association and Freight Transport Association are supporting Highways England's calls for drivers to check their vehicles, trailers and loads before setting off on journeys.

Ben Aldous, RAC patrol of the year, said:

Just a few minutes spent making sure things like bikes, roofboxes and caravans are completely secure, and then double-checking them can make the difference between a trouble-free journey and one that puts people's lives at risk as well as causes long delays for other travellers. We'd ask everyone checks loads at the same time as looking at things like tyre tread and pressure, and oil and coolant levels. The more care drivers take before setting out, the smoother their journeys.

Chris Yarsley, Policy Manager from the Freight Transport Association, said:

Paying close attention to load security must be a primary concern for all drivers using our roads and we would advise the public to check their vehicles closely before departure, in the same way that logistics operators conduct a daily walk round check before starting work to ensure everything is safe and secure. Transporting a secure load not only keeps others on the road safe but also ensures that vehicles and loads arrive on time, without incident, which is the primary aim of all our members and their customers.

Tom Cotton, Policy and Infrastructure Manager for the RHA, said:

As well as a safety concern, the recovery of items from the road network can cause congestion and delays, the RHA considers it's really important to take steps to make sure vehicle loads are secure.

Journey planning advice, including making sure vehicles are ready for the road, can be [found on the Think website](#). Advice on securing loads is available on this [webpage](#).

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.