



Coupling and uncoupling of vehicles

Accidents occur during coupling up because it is common practice for trailers to be parked on the emergency brake by disconnecting the emergency airline ('dropping the red line') rather than by applying the trailer parking brake. This is unsafe practice because connecting the airlines to a parked semi-trailer, when its parking brake is not applied, releases its brakes under air pressure and the vehicle combination can then move, particularly on an incline.

Coupling of vehicles:

- **Ensure the trailer parking brake is applied.**
- Check that the height of the trailer is correct so that it will receive the tractor unit safely.
- Reverse the tractor unit slowly under the semi trailer and listen for the locking mechanism to engage.
- Select a low gear and try to move forward in order to test that the locking mechanism has engaged. **Do this twice to make sure.**
- **Ensure the parking brake on the tractor unit is applied.**
- Visually check the engagement of the fifth wheel and, depending on the type of mechanism, fit the safety clip.
- Connect the airlines, ABS/EBS and Electrical lines.
- Raise the landing legs fully and stow the handle away safely.
- Release the trailer parking brake.
- Check that the air is building up in the storage tanks. Listen for any leaks
- Fit number plate (and any necessary warning plates)
- Carry out full check of the tractor and trailer – tyres, lights etc.

Uncoupling of vehicles:

- Check the ground is firm and level enough to support the landing legs and the weight of the trailer (especially if loaded)
- **Ensure that both the UNIT & TRAILER parking brake have been applied, applying the tractor brake before leaving the cab.**
- Lower the landing legs fully to the ground and stow the handle away safely. If necessary put supports under the feet to prevent them sinking into the ground
- Disconnect the airlines, ABS/EBS and Electrical lines.
- Depending on the type of mechanism, remove any safety clip securing the kingpin release handle.
- Release the fifth wheel coupling locking bar.
- **Drive the tractor unit away slowly, checking the semi trailer either directly or in the mirrors.**



BLACK – Brakes – Legs – Airlines – Clip – King Pin

What the law says:

If you couple or uncouple a semi-trailer without applying the parking brake on the tractor unit or leave a semi-trailer parked without its parking brake applied, you are breaking health and safety law and may be responsible for killing or injuring yourself or someone else.

Whenever completing a close coupling operation, always double check to ensure that the handbrake has been applied to both the unit and the trailer.