

VESSEL INSPECTION BULLETIN 02-09

1. BACKGROUND:

Recently while retrieving a 21' small boat, a hitch came out of the receiver of a tow vehicle and the trailer and boat rolled back down the ramp and into the water. The trailer ended up with the tongue in 2' of water with the boat floating above it. The trailer was equipped with steel safety cables coated with plastic in lieu of chains. The cables parted from the weight of the boat-trailer combination when the receiver failed. The locking pin was missing from the receiver which caused the hitch to separate from the receiver. After examining the failed safety cables it was discovered that they had corroded under the plastic coating hidden from view and rendering them useless.

2. DISCUSSION:

Annual Trailer Evaluations (ATE) are conducted by Vessel Operations Coordinators (VOC), Commanding Officers (CO), or their designee(s) using the approved ATE checklist. The checklist can be found here:

http://www.sbp.noaa.gov/resources/inspection/pdfs/Annual_Trailer_Evaluation_Checklist_Rev1206_Fillable.pdf. Special attention should be paid to the condition of the safety chains/cables during the annual evaluation. They shall also be inspected before each use for obvious damage. Trailer hitches and receivers come as a set from the manufacturer and should not be used with parts from another manufacturer. Items in questionable condition shall be replaced with factory original parts with the requisite load rating required.

3. ACTION:

Adequate safety chains must be used and conform to the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) J684 standard, "TRAILER COUPLING AND HITCHES - AUTOMOTIVE TYPE". The strength rating of EACH length of safety chain or cable must be equal to or greater than the trailer GVWR. Cables with plastic coatings can hide corrosion which could cause them to fail when needed and are therefore discouraged from use. However, if they are used they should be inspected closely for signs of corrosion and replaced if any corrosion is present. If they require replacement it is strongly recommended that chain of proper size and strength rating be used in lieu of plastic coated cables.

4. SUMMARY:

Taking time to do things right is a daily commitment. What may seem like a harmless substitution and a rush to the finish line could end up in a disastrous result. Start with the proper equipment and ensure it is in good serviceable condition.

5. REFERENCES:

Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) J684 standard, "TRAILER COUPLING AND HITCHES - AUTOMOTIVE TYPE"

NOAA Annual Trailer Evaluation (ATE) checklist (Rev. 12-06)