Transporting Oversized Loads

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

GENERAL

If you've ever spent much time driving on U.S. expressways, then you're familiar with this sight: A large flatbed tractor-trailer is in front of you with what looks to be a full-sized house at rest on the bed. There are signs everywhere declaring it an "oversize load," and a small car with a tiny, yellow warning light on top is following it to make sure nobody gets too close.

Oversize load

It's what you call it when a truck needs to haul something that's deemed too large for the road it's traveling on. This can be anything from a mobile home to a large piece of construction equipment or materials. The common denominator for oversized loads is that they can't be made smaller for transport.

What constitutes an oversize load varies from state to state and within those states, from city to city, if the truck travels on smaller, local roadways. This is important because wherever you travel, you'll need a permit. Any time you cross a state line, you'll need to have your permit in hand. If you get off the major highway to deliver your load, you'll need a city permit, even if you have the state permit. State highways are governed by a different agency than local roads. It's the same reason you'll see highway patrol cars writing tickets on expressways and local law enforcement setting up shop in town.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

HAZARDS

Oversize loads present a hazard to roadway structures as well as to road traffic. Because they exceed design clearances, there is a

risk that such vehicles can hit bridges and other overhead structures. Over-height vehicle impacts are a frequent cause of damage to bridges, and truss bridges are particularly vulnerable, due to having critical support members over the roadway.

It is important to know that overweight loads can be damaging to highways, bridges and local roads. In fact, studies have found that a single truck carrying a 40-ton load can do as much damage to a highway as 9,600 cars. Overweight load rules and regulations allow states and cities to protect their infrastructure and save on repairs.

Overweight Load

Maximum limits can vary by state. For example, in Wisconsin and many other states an oversize load cannot exceed 40 tons or 80,000 pounds. Some states have exceptions, thanks to influence from local industries and lobbies. They say everything is bigger in Texas, and this includes load size. The Lone State allows overweight limits to be exceeded by 2 tons. Nevada can permit overweight load extensions up to 170,000 pounds.

Dimensions of an Oversize Load

Determining whether a load is oversized will largely depend on where you're traveling and what roads you're using, so make sure to investigate local laws before shipping any items you think might fall into this category.

Every state has slightly different regulations when it comes to oversize loads, but below are the average dimensions that qualify a load as oversized:

- **How wide is a wide load?** Any load that is more than 8 ft. 6 in. in width is considered a wide load.
- **How high is an oversize load?** Any load that is over 13 ft. 6 in. high is considered an oversize load.
- **What is considered an overweight load?** Generally, any load that is over 46,000 lbs. is considered overweight.

Examples of Oversize or Wide Loads

Regulations around oversize loads fluctuate depending on the area. That being said, here are some examples of items that are generally classified as oversized:

- Tractors
- Combines
- Bulldozers
- Cranes
- Loaders
- Backhoes
- Mobile homes
- Prefabricated homes
- Wind blades
- Steel beams
- Generators

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

SPECIFICS ABOUT OVERSIZE MOVE

The first step is to determine the height, width, and weight of the load. This information will determine the following:

- Truck and bed size needed.
- Route it’ll be able to take.
- What kind of devices needed to safely secure the load.
- What permits it’ll need to secure.
- How to accurately price your move.
- How many and what kinds of signage to bring.
- Whether you’ll need one or more pilot cars.

Be Aware

The use of pilot cars is often dependent in the laws of each state.

Example:

The state of Georgia requires a permit on state highways for a load larger than any of the following:

- 8 feet, 6 inches wide (2.59 meters)
- 13 feet, 6 inches high (4.11 meters)
- 100 feet long (30.48 meters)

More Examples:

- In towing oversize loads, you'll need one pilot car on two-lane highways if your load is more than 75 feet (22.86 meters) long or more than 15 feet, 6 inches (4.72 meters) high.
- You'll need two pilot cars, one in the front and one in the rear, if your load is more than 125 feet (38.1 meters) long or more than 12 feet (3.65 meters) wide.
- On four-lane highways, you'll have to get one pilot car when your load is more than 75 feet (22.86 meters) long and 12 feet (3.65 meters) wide.
- The double pilot becomes necessary when it's more than 125 feet (38.1 meters) long and 14 feet (4.26 meters) wide or more.

Oversize Towing Tips:

- All states and cities have different laws for when you're allowed to travel with your oversize load.
- Most won't let you drive during the morning or evening rush hours, or at night.
- Some states won't allow travel on Sundays, so keep this in mind when making your moving arrangements.
- Signage also varies from state-to-state, requiring specific sizes, colors and quantities of signs and flags, depending on your load.

FINAL WORD

It is clear that in order to accomplish oversize loads, there has to be a thorough understanding of civic, local and national regulations dealing with oversize loads.