Truck Tarping Meeting Kit

What’s At Stake

Truckers use tarps to cover and secure their loads and protect other drivers and pedestrians. One of the most significant injuries risks your drivers face, however, are falls that can occur as tarps are being installed.

LOADS THAT REQUIRE TARPS

Various types of loads require tarps. The most common are finished machinery such as boilers or CNC machines, steel coil and tubing, lumber or construction materials, some types of construction equipment, vehicle parts (unless it is a load headed for scrap), and certain drilling and mining equipment.

There is also the occasional mixed load in which part of the load requires tarping and the other does not. The best tarping option for mixed loads is up to the driver, often times requiring a certain amount of creativity ensuring that either the entire load – or at least the part that must be covered – is tarped correctly.

What’s the Danger

COMMON HAZARDS FOR TARPING

But the ultimate hazard for tarping is wind. Wind makes tying down tarps very difficult. It can cause the tarp to flap against your trailer or your cargo. This flapping can cause damage to your tarp, trailer, or cargo.

Another hazard can be an unusual cargo shape. Properly balancing out cargo for shape and weight is a learned skill that’s critical for safety. An unbalanced load can ruin an operator’s day.

TARPING SAFETY IS THE NUMBER ONE PRIORITY

Many workplace injuries involve handling tarps. These risks

include falls, muscle overexertion injuries, and abrasions. All companies need to make sure adequate tarping safety precautions are in place. They must make sure the appropriate tarps are used, and mechanical aids are available to avoid these risks. Employees also need to be informed about the risks and best tarping safety practices.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

HOW TO SAFELY INSTALL TARPS – THE MECHANICS

If an employee must climb the truck to install a tarp, they need to use a fall arrest system to securely tie-in and limit the distance they could fall. When moving a tarp by hand, use good body mechanics—employees should face the tarp, keep their back straight, and pull the tarp out with their hands at about waist height. They should avoid twisting or pulling down with their arms overhead. Other steps to follow include:

- Use steps or a small ladder to climb and dismount. Face the truck and keep three points of contact at all times when climbing and moving around.
- When walking around and over the load—watch for gaps between items. Keep a firm grip on the tarp and ropes to prevent slipping.
- Spread the feet to shoulder width apart and stagger them slightly for the most power and stability.
- Watch for surface winds or gusts from traffic that could cause the tarp to fly away.
- Securely fix tarps to the load.
- When working at ground level, watch for oncoming traffic.
- Never jump from the load or truck.

TARP REMOVAL PRACTICES – THE MECHANICS

Tarp removal requires a safe and efficient procedure – don’t just yank it off! Be sure to wear safety gear and identify any gaps or safety concerns. Sharp edges on loads are common, even if you don’t think there are any. A ripped tarp is money down the drain. You can also potentially damage cargo if the tarp is covering a

load directly, instead of a load in a container.

Remove tie downs, lift a corner of the tarp, and allow the wind underneath the tarp. Let wind give you a hand. Wind is awful when trying to tie down a tarp, but when you're removing it, the wind can help you separate the tarp from the load.

If there's no breeze, a few flaps of the tarp as you're removing it can help. With the weight of a tarp, though, this isn't always easy! Once the tarp is off, roll or fold it back up and then get forklift assistance to lift and transport the tarp to its storage place.

To remove a tarp, loosen it by fanning to move air underneath. Employees need to use their arms, legs, and body weight to pull the tarp off the truck. Watch for any unstable loads. Lay the tarp out on a flat area and check for holes or damage. Don't walk on tarps—as this can cause damage to the tarp and be a slip hazard for the employee.

Plan a pickup or delivery job before driving to a site. Know the site layout for the customers most frequently visited. Get advanced information on the load or material details and loading/unloading procedures, including available equipment and help. Consider the truck type, height, and access points before heading out on the road. Ask directly about the tarping policy; can it be done on site, or will the driver need to find a safe area outside the facility? Never tarp on the side of a busy road or highway.

BEST WORKER SAFETY PRECAUTIONS IN TARPING OPERATIONS

- Lightweight tarps might seem easier to use, but they create unique hazards. Employees need to recognise that these tarps might be more dangerous, especially if they underestimate the amount of force needed to remove them without the right equipment.
- Tarps become more dangerous during high wind velocities. Tarps that are blown fast enough could knock workers off their ladders or the top of the truck. They need the right

scaffolding in place to minimise these dangers.

- Employees are far more likely to injure themselves while manually handling tarps. They run the risk of overexertion, strained muscle injuries, or balance loss. Mechanical aids significantly reduce these risks.
- Always crave over a tarp or load, rather than stand on top of it.
- Keeping tarps indoors during the loading process when temperatures are below freezing, so that the tarp can defrost.
- Unroll the rear tarp before starting to unroll the front tarp.
- Properly secure all corners of the tarp.

FINAL WORD

Truckers who operate tank cars, flatbeds, gravel trucks and similar vehicles use tarps to secure and cover their loads in the course of their work. Falls are serious safety concerns in installation and removal of tarps.