

# Keep your load restrained

Curtain-sided XL standard vehicles no longer need internal load restraint, but it doesn't mean operators don't need to strap up

By **Chris Tindall**

A POLICY CHANGE AT the DVSA relating to curtain-sided trailers and bodies built to European Standard EN 12642-XL has been announced, along with a warning not to ignore the test certificate specification.

The enforcement agency says operators no longer need internal load restraint systems when using these vehicles, because the body and curtains are strong enough to contain the load.

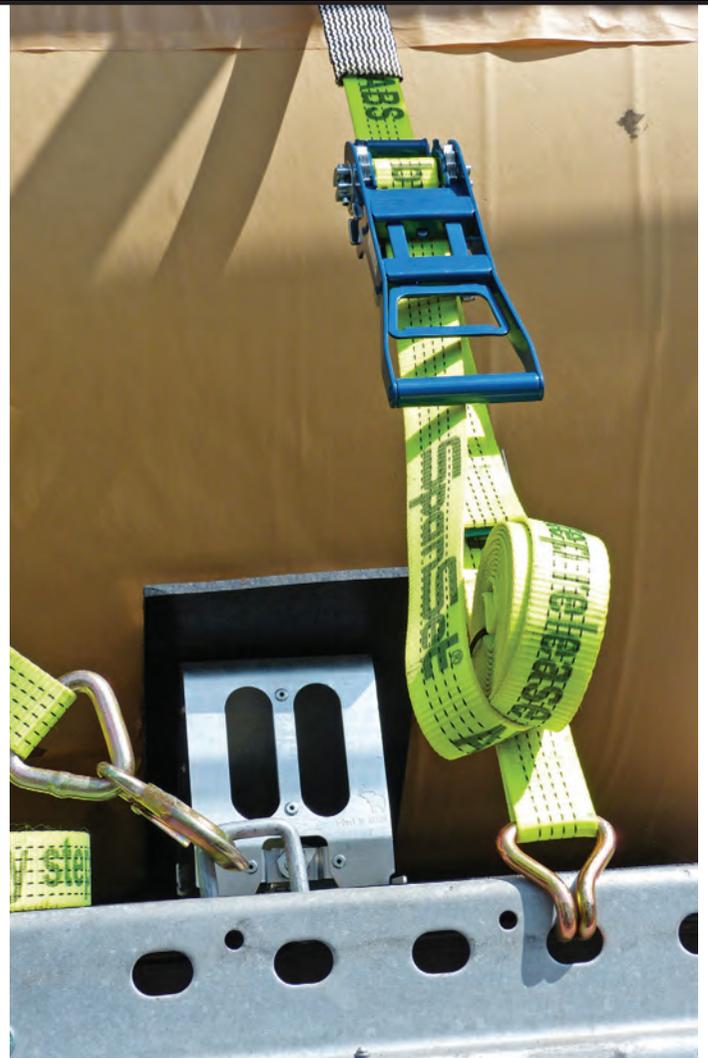
But there are important caveats to this decision, and companies are urged not to rely on the XL rating itself as a reason not to strap their loads down.

Until recently, the DVSA accepted that vehicles built to the EN 12642-XL standard would provide 40% of security to the side (see box).

## A positive fit

But after a working group of industry stakeholders was set up to discuss the issue, the DVSA says it now accepts these vehicles as providing 50% of load security to the side – as long as the load is a positive fit.

A DVSA spokesman says: “The DVSA has not relaxed its approach to load security in curtain-sided vehicles. We have reviewed our current approach to EN 12642-XL rated vehicles and, after further consultation with the



**Certified:** XL-rated vehicles are manufactured to a higher standard than normal trailers

## Curtains for you

**Until the announcement** about XL-rated vehicles' load security, the DVSA followed the DfT's 2002 code of practice, Safety of Loads on Vehicles, which states curtains cannot meet the load restraint requirement of withstanding a sideways force equivalent to 50% of the weight of the load.

This guidance was followed in 2006 by the publication of the European Standard EN 12642-XL for curtain-sided body strength, which set a threshold equivalent to 40% of maximum payload.

Because this was below the 50% referred to in the DfT guidance, the DVSA insisted that all bodies and trailers, including XL-rated ones, had additional internal load restraint.

But new European guidance (still in draft) states that vehicles built to the XL standard will meet 50% of load securing to the side, meaning the DVSA will now accept these vehicles as providing 50% of load security to the side – as long as the load is a positive fit.

trade and experts at the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), changed our policy to better represent the risk presented by these vehicles.

“XL-rated vehicles are manufactured to a higher standard than normal trailers and, when positively loaded, provide sufficient security to meet the [Department for Transport] requirements.”

However, despite the insistence that its approach to load security has not been relaxed, the enforcement agency is likely to be aware that many operators will view the change in policy as a reason to invest in XL-rated vehicles, in the mistaken belief that they are saving their drivers the hassle – and time – of strapping loads down.

“That's the concern,” says Richard Owens, group marketing manager at Don-Bur. “The core of the problem is that there are a large number of operators who will get the cheapest and quickest solution that they can get away with and think they can drive past the DVSA guys without getting PG9s. But it doesn't mean it doesn't need a load restraint inside.”

## Load containment standard

Owens says the DVSA remains intent on load restraint and clarifies that EN 12642-XL is “a load containment standard”. “Herein lies the reason for the caveats,” he continues. “To minimise load shift within the confines of the body, the DVSA has stipulated that the load must be a ‘positive fit’. Firstly, any gap between the load and the side

curtains must not exceed 80mm. The load must be positioned up to the front bulkhead and the rear of the load must be restrained with a net or other means to prevent rearward shift if there is any space remaining at the rear of the body.”

Owens says a large number of operators cannot achieve a positive fit, due to the nature of their operations. “Loading up against the front bulkhead is a common enough practice but maintaining a slim gap between load and curtains is rarely guaranteed. Add to that the requirement to restrain the load at the rear and EN 12642-XL starts to look a little less inviting. Certainly, any operator on multi-drop contracts will need to think more than twice before going down the XL route,” he says.

Andy Mair, the Freight Transport Association’s head of engineering policy, who also sits on the working group, agrees there is a concern that operators will go out and buy an XL-rated vehicle, thinking that their strapping concerns can be consigned to history. “The proof is in the pudding with XL; they all come with certificates stipulating the loading requirements, which would allow them to operate them without strapping,” he says. “People need to pay heed to the advice in those, otherwise they would need to strap. Those who benefit from positive fit are [operators transporting] palletised goods, front to back, side to side and tipping the lot in one go. If you have a diminishing load, you will have to have an additional strap.”

### The official line

Whatever the intent of operators eyeing up these trailers, the official line from the working group is that moving to 50% as an enforcement standard makes it more simple and comprehensible for everyone.

A Health and Safety Executive spokeswoman says: “The DfT code of practice has always mandated that the securing system must be capable of withstanding a force equivalent to half the weight of the load. It is up to



**Positive fit:** Unless the load is a positive fit operators will still need to strap it up

operators how they choose to achieve that, and to be able to demonstrate that their chosen system complies. The EN 12642 test method only certifies that an XL trailer must be able to withstand 40% of the rated payload without permanent deformation. For the majority of loads carried, that rating will easily fulfil the 50% securing requirement, even without friction between the load and the load bed being considered.”

The spokeswoman adds: “However, operators should take care to ensure that they are loading to the specifications of the test certificate if they are going to use the XL structure alone for load securing – namely a full load, with minimal gaps to the sides. An XL rating in itself does not mean the load is secure.” ■

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