

**Rhode Island TITLE 31  
Motor and Other vehicles**

**Trailer Summary:**

**Dimensions:** Dimensions shall not exceed: a width of 102 inches; and a total height of 162 inches.

Combinations of vehicles consisting of truck-tractor and semi-trailer coupled together shall not be restricted in overall length, and semi-trailers shall not exceed fifty-three feet (53') in length, excluding bumpers and accessories.

Towaway trailer transporter combinations shall not be restricted to an overall length limitation of less than eighty-two feet (82').

**Brakes:** Every trailer or semi-trailer of a gross weight of four thousand pounds (4,000 lbs.) or more, when operated upon a highway, shall be equipped with brakes adequate to control the movement of and to stop and to hold the vehicle, and so designed as to be applied by the driver of the towing motor vehicle from the driver's normal operating position, and the brakes shall be so designed and connected that in case of an accidental breakaway of the towed vehicle, the brakes shall be automatically applied.

**Lighting/Reflectors:** On every trailer or semi-trailer having a gross weight in excess of three thousand pounds (3,000 lbs.): On the front, 2 clearance lamps, one at each side; on each side, 2 side marker lamps, one at or near the front and one at or near the rear; on each side, 2 reflectors, one at or near the front and one at or near the rear; on the rear, 2 clearance lamps, one at each side; on the rear, two 2 reflectors, one at each side; and on the rear, one stop light.

**Hitch/Signals:** When one vehicle is towing another the drawbar or other connection shall be of sufficient strength to pull all weight towed by it and the drawbar or other connection shall not exceed fifteen feet (15') from one vehicle to the other.

**Mirrors:** Every motor vehicle which is so constructed or loaded as to obstruct the driver's view to the rear of it from the driver's position shall be equipped with a mirror so located as to reflect to the driver a view of the highway for a distance of at least 200 feet to the rear of the vehicle.

**Speed Limits:** As posted.

**Towing:** A tow truck or any vehicle towing another, except when designed to be in combination, when on any public highway divided into multiple lanes for travel in the same direction, may travel only in the right lane of a 2-lane highway, or the 2 right lanes of a 3- or more lane highway.

**Other:** N/A

**§ 31-1-5 Trailers. –**

(a) "Automobile transporter" means any vehicle combination designed and used for the transport of assembled highway vehicles, including truck camper units. An automobile transporter shall

not be prohibited from the transport of cargo or general freight on a backhaul, provided it complies with weight limitations for a truck tractor and semitrailer combination

(b) "Pole trailer" means every vehicle without motive power designed to be drawn by another vehicle and attached to the towing vehicle by means of a reach, or pole, or by being boomed or secured to the towing vehicle, and ordinarily used for transporting long or irregularly shaped loads such as poles, pipes, or structural members capable, generally, of sustaining themselves as beams between the supporting connections.

(c) "Semi-trailer" means every vehicle with or without motive power, other than a pole trailer, designed for carrying persons or property and for being drawn by a motor vehicle, constructed so that some of its weight and that of its load rests upon or is carried by another vehicle.

(d) "Tractor-semi-trailer combination" means every combination of a tractor and a semi-trailer properly attached to the tractor to form an articulated vehicle.

(e) "Tractor-trailer combination" means every combination of a tractor and a trailer, properly attached to the tractor to form an articulated vehicle.

(f) "Trailer" means every vehicle without motive power, other than a pole trailer, designed for carrying persons or property and for being drawn by a motor vehicle, constructed so that none of its weight rests upon the towing vehicle.

**§ 31-23-4 Brake equipment required.** – (a) Every motor vehicle, other than a motorcycle or motor-driven cycle, when operated upon a highway, shall be equipped with brakes adequate to control the movement of and to stop and hold the vehicle, including two (2) separate means of applying the brakes, each of which means shall be effective to apply the brakes to at least two (2) wheels. If these two separate means of applying the brakes are connected in any way, they shall be so constructed that failure of any one part of the operating mechanism shall not leave the motor vehicle without brakes on at least two (2) wheels.

(b) Every motorcycle, and motor-driven cycle, when operated upon a highway shall be equipped with at least one brake, which may be operated by hand or foot, and which is adequate to control and stop the vehicle.

(c) Every trailer or semi-trailer of a gross weight of four thousand pounds (4,000 lbs.) or more, when operated upon a highway, shall be equipped with brakes adequate to control the movement of and to stop and to hold the vehicle, and so designed as to be applied by the driver of the towing motor vehicle from the driver's normal operating position, and the brakes shall be so designed and connected that in case of an accidental breakaway of the towed vehicle, the brakes shall be automatically applied.

(d) Every new motor vehicle, trailer or semi-trailer sold in this state and operated upon the highways shall be equipped with service brakes upon all wheels of the vehicle, except any motorcycle or motor-driven cycle, and except that any semi-trailer of less than four thousand pounds (4,000 lbs.) gross weight need not be equipped with brakes.

(e) In any combination of motor-drawn vehicles, means shall be provided for applying:

(1) The rearmost trailer brakes, of any trailer equipped with brakes, in approximate synchronism with the brakes on the towing vehicle and developing the required braking effort on the rearmost wheels at the fastest rate; or

(2) Braking effort first on the rearmost trailer equipped with brakes; or

(3) Both of the above means capable of being used alternatively may be employed.

(f) Every motor vehicle, trailer, semi-trailer, and pole trailer, and any combination of those vehicles, except motorcycles and motor-driven cycles, shall be equipped with parking brakes adequate to hold the vehicle on any grade on which it is operated under all conditions of loading on a surface free from snow, ice, or loose material. The parking brakes shall be capable of being applied in conformance with the requirements in this subsection by the driver's muscular effort, by spring action, or by equivalent means. The operation may be assisted by the service brakes or other source of power, provided that failure of the service brake actuation system or other power assisting mechanism will not prevent the parking brakes from being applied in conformance with the requirements in this subsection. The parking brakes shall be so designed that when once applied they shall remain applied with the required effectiveness, despite exhaustion of any source of energy or leakage of any kind. The same brake drums, brake shoes and lining assemblies, brake shoe anchors, and mechanical brake shoe actuation mechanism normally associated with the wheel brake assemblies may be used for both the service brakes and the parking brakes. If the means of applying the parking brakes and the service brakes are connected in any way, they shall be so constructed that failure of any one part shall not leave the vehicle without operative brakes.

(g) The brake shoes operating within or upon the drums on the vehicle wheels of any motor vehicle may be used for both service and hand operation.

(h) It shall be unlawful to sell, offer for sale, or distribute brake linings for use on motor vehicles, unless they are of a type and meet specifications promulgated by the administrator of the division of motor vehicles. The administrator of the division of motor vehicles is authorized and empowered to adopt and amend regulations governing types and promulgate specifications of brake linings which comply with approved standards, as promulgated by the vehicle equipment safety commission, and shall establish and maintain an approved list of brake linings meeting the specifications as established in this chapter. Any person who violates the provisions of this section shall be guilty of a civil violation and is subject to fines enumerated in § 31-41.1-4.

**§ 31-25-3 Maximum width.** – The total outside width of any vehicle or the load on it shall not exceed one hundred two inches (102") excluding any safety and noncargo carrying appurtenances on either motorized campers or camping recreational vehicles. Violations of this section are subject to fines enumerated in § 31-41.1-4.

**§ 31-25-4 Maximum height.** – No vehicle including any load on it shall exceed a height of one hundred sixty-two inches (162"). Violations of this section are subject to fines enumerated in § 31-41.1-4.

**§ 31-25-5 Maximum length of single vehicle and load.** – No vehicle, including any load on it, except Rhode Island public transit authority articulated buses, shall exceed a length of forty feet (40') extreme overall dimension inclusive of front and rear bumpers, or in the case of a motor bus, motorized camper or camping recreational vehicle forty-five feet (45').

**§ 31-25-6 Maximum number and length of coupled vehicles.** –

(a) No combination of vehicles coupled together shall consist of more than three (3) units, a truck-tractor, semi-trailer, and trailer. The combination of vehicles shall not be restricted in overall length, except that when a truck-tractor, semi-trailer, and a trailer are used in combination, the trailer or semi-trailer each shall not exceed twenty-eight and one-half feet (28' 6"), excluding bumpers and accessories. Provided, however, that combinations of vehicles consisting of three (3) units shall be permitted to operate only on the interstate highway system and on those highways, streets, and roads designated by the director of the department of transportation.

(b) Combinations of vehicles consisting of truck-tractor and semi-trailer coupled together shall not be restricted in overall length, and semi-trailers shall not exceed fifty-three feet (53') in length, excluding bumpers and accessories. Towaway trailer transporter combinations shall not be restricted to an overall length limitation of less than eighty-two feet (82'). Semi-trailers exceeding forty-eight and one-half feet (48' 6") shall be permitted to operate only on the interstate highway system and on those highways, streets, and roads designated by the director of the department of transportation. Exceptions to the requirements of this section include the use of a pole trailer and combinations designed to transport motor vehicles and/or automobiles as authorized in §§ 31-25-7 and 31-25-8. The provision that no combination of vehicles coupled together shall consist of more than three (3) units shall not apply to vehicles coupled together by a saddle mount device used to transport motor vehicles in a drive-away service when no more than three (3) saddle mounts are used, and equipment used in the combination is approved by Part 393.71 of the federal motor carrier safety regulations, 49 C.F.R. § 393.71, and safety regulations of the division of motor vehicles of the department of revenue of the state of Rhode Island as this federal and/or state legislation may be amended or revised from time to time. Any owner or operator found deviating from the approval permitted routes shall be fined a minimum mandatory fine of five hundred dollars (\$500), but not more than one thousand dollars (\$1,000).

(c) The distance from the kingpin of the trailer to the center of the rear axle may not exceed forty-one feet (41').

(d) Fifty-three foot (53') trailers shall be equipped with a rear-end protection device of substantial construction consisting of a continuous lateral beam extending to within four inches (4") of the lateral extremities of the trailer, and located not more than twenty-two inches (22") from the surface of the road as measured with the vehicle empty and on level surface.

(e) Violations of this section are subject to fines enumerated in § 31-41.1-4.

### **31-25-11. Connections between coupled vehicles.**

When one vehicle is towing another the drawbar or other connection shall be of sufficient strength to pull all weight towed by it and the drawbar or other connection shall not exceed fifteen feet (15') from one vehicle to the other, except the connection between any two (2) vehicles transporting poles, pipe, machinery, or other objects of structural nature which cannot readily be dismembered. Violations of this section are subject to fines enumerated in § 31-41.1-4.

### **31-24-36. Vehicles requiring special **lights** and reflectors — Time of **lighting**.**

- Those sections of this chapter which follow immediately, including §§ 31-24-37 — 31-24-44, relating to clearance and marker lamps, reflectors, and stop **lights**, shall apply as stated in those sections to vehicles of the type enumerated in those sections, namely passenger buses, trucks, truck tractors, and certain **trailers**, semi-**trailers**, and pole **trailers**, respectively, when operated upon any highway. These vehicles shall be equipped as required, and all lamp equipment required shall be **lighted** at the times mentioned in § 31-24-1, except that clearance and side marker lamps need not be **lighted** on the vehicle when operated within any municipality where there is sufficient **light** to render clearly discernible persons and vehicles on the highway at a distance of five hundred feet (500'). Violations of this section are subject to fines enumerated in § 31-41.1-4.

### **31-23-15. Rear-view mirror.**

- (a) Every motor vehicle which is so constructed or loaded as to obstruct the driver's view to the rear of it from the driver's position shall be equipped with a **mirror** so located as to reflect to the driver a view of the highway for a distance of at least two hundred feet (200') to the rear of the vehicle.
- (b) Every motor vehicle, the primary function of which is the carrying of passengers, shall be equipped with a rear-view **mirror** on the left front door or fender, so located as to reflect a view of the highway for at least two hundred feet (200') to the rear of the vehicle.
- (c) Violations of this section are subject to fines enumerated in § 31-41.1-4.

### **§ 31-25-12.1. Vehicles to be towed in right lane**

- (a) When a tow truck or other vehicle is towing another vehicle, except those vehicles designed to be in combination, in this state upon any public highway divided into two (2) or more clearly marked lanes for travel in the same direction, it shall be unlawful to tow except in the right lane of travel on a two (2) line highway, and in the two (2) right lanes of travel on a highway with three (3) or more lanes.

- (b) Any person who violates the provisions of this section shall, upon conviction, be fined in accordance with the penalties provided in § 31-41.1-4.

### **§ 31-24-7. Tail lamps required**

Every motor vehicle, trailer, semi-trailer, and pole trailer, and any other vehicle which is being drawn at the end of a train of vehicles, shall be equipped with at least one tail lamp mounted on the rear, which when lighted as required in this chapter, shall emit a red light plainly visible from a distance of five hundred feet (500') to the rear, provided that in the case of a train of vehicles only the tail lamp on the rearmost vehicle need actually be seen from the distance specified. Violations of this section are subject to fines enumerated in § 31-41.1-4.

### **§ 31-24-37. Clearance and marker lamps and reflectors**

In addition to other equipment required in chapters 1 -- 27 of this title, the following vehicles shall be equipped as follows under the conditions stated in § 31-24-36.

(1) On every bus or truck, whatever its size, there shall be the following:

- (i) On the rear, two (2) reflectors, one at each side; and
- (ii) On the rear, one stop light.

(2) On every bus or truck eighty inches (80") or more in overall width, in addition to the requirements in subdivision (1) of this section:

- (i) On the front, two (2) clearance lamps, one at each side;
- (ii) On the rear, two (2) clearance lamps, one at each side;
- (iii) On each side, two (2) side marker lamps, one at or near the front and one at or near the rear;
- (iv) On each side, two (2) reflectors, one at or near the front and one at or near the rear.

(3) On every truck tractor:

- (i) On the front, two (2) clearance lamps, one at each side;
- (ii) On the rear, one stop light.

(4) On every trailer or semi-trailer having a gross weight in excess of three thousand pounds (3,000 lbs.):

- (i) On the front, two (2) clearance lamps, one at each side;
- (ii) On each side, two (2) side marker lamps, one at or near the front and one at or near the rear;
- (iii) On each side, two (2) reflectors, one at or near the front and one at or near the rear;
- (iv) On the rear, two (2) clearance lamps, one at each side;

(v) On the rear, two (2) reflectors, one at each side; and

(vi) On the rear, one stop light.

(5) On every pole trailer in excess of three thousand pounds (3,000 lbs.) gross weight:

(i) On each side, one side marker lamp and one clearance lamp which may be in combination, to show to the front, side, and rear.

(ii) On the rear of the pole trailer or load, two (2) reflectors, one at each side.

(6) On every trailer, semi-trailer, or pole trailer weighing three thousand pounds (3,000 lbs.) gross or less:

(i) On the rear, two (2) reflectors, one on each side.

If any trailer or semi-trailer is so loaded or is of such dimensions as to obscure the stop light on the towing vehicle, then the vehicle shall also be equipped with one stop light.

(7) Violations of this section are subject to fines enumerated in § 31-41.1-4.