

Manufactured housing and mobile homes transport | Laws on moving oversized manufactured buildings

Introduction

Towing manufactured housing is a trucking specialty unlike most—almost all assignments are oversized—both in width and length, and occasionally in height. And once you deliver the unit, you leave most of the “trailer” behind.

The fact is, moving a “manufactured housing” unit can be major undertaking.

There are two distinctly different towing assignments associated with manufactured housing: (1) delivering a new unit to a customer’s site, and (2) picking up and relocating an existing unit from one location and moving it to another. Still, hauling the units involves the same considerations.

Either way, as the driver towing a prefabricated home, you are transporting a family’s major investment and your service and professionalism will be a major part of the homeowners’ experience.

Challenges

The first challenge is that, unlike most trucking tasks, manufactured housing transport requires transporting structures that were not intended to move on highways on trailer assemblies that are temporary and designed more to support the structure and less about being optimized for highway use.

Also, deliveries are not to terminals or businesses with loading docks and forklifts, but to vacant dirt or grass lots, sometimes with limited maneuvering room. With manufactured home units, the “trailer” is actually the foundation for the structure, and once delivered the trailer assembly is mounted on concrete blocks or pillars—the house’s foundation, and the entire wheel and axle assemblies are removed and returned to the manufacturing facilities to be reused.

With modern manufactured housing, a single home may be made up of two or three separate towable units, that can be combined at the home site to create a finished home that is comparable in quality and size to many contractor-built homes.

So, from the truck driver’s point of view, what issues are involved in transporting large, oversized mobile homes or large manufactured housing units?

Equipment

First, this is a very specialized service—beginning with a specialized towing unit, the toter.

Unlike typical tractor-trailer rigs, mobile and manufactured homes are towed using a more-or-less traditional ball hitch, and the tractor is called a Toter, or Mobile Home Toter—a tractor unit specifically designed for the modular and manufactured housing

industries. Some toters are highly adapted for purposes of delivering or removing mobile homes on smaller home sites. Others look and operate like over-the-road semi-trailer tractors with a longer wheelbase and a sleeper cab.

Some Toters are hybrids, with both a fifth wheel and a ball hitch. The ball-and-hitch is a more fitting design for the height demands of the housing industry considering that the hitch is at the level of the bottom of the towed unit.

The toter is often confused or mistaken for a semi-trailer tractor. The key difference between the two is in the method of coupling. Toters are equipped with a 2-5/16" diameter ball that couples with the tow hitch on the tongue of a mobile or manufactured home or the removable transport frame of a modular home.

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Mirrors

Toters are required to have extending mirrors. Home section widths range from eight to eighteen feet. Toters have mirrors that can extend (manually, by electrically, or hydraulically) to enable the operator to see beyond the unit. This increases safety for public road situations. The mirrors also enable the operator to better navigate narrow roads and obstacles such as signs, mailboxes, trees, and other automobiles.

Permits and Requirements

Weight of the mobile home – According to Free Mobile Home Info, older mobile homes typically weigh between 35 to 40 lbs. per square foot, while newer manufactured homes weigh anywhere from 45 to 50 lbs. per square foot. That means an 800 sq. ft. mobile home could weigh approximately 40,000 lbs. The weight includes the frame/chassis of the structure/trailer. Add to that the wheels and any materials carried inside the building to determine the actual weight of a unit to be towed.

For the heaviest moves, some states specify that the toter weigh 32,000 lb. This means that a 40,000-lb manufactured housing unit plus the toter should weigh in at about 72,000 lb., well below the national maximum of 80,000 lb. for national highways and should not be subject to overweight fees.

The typical width of production manufactured and modular homes is approximately 12 feet. This makes it a permissible, nondivisible load with only limited restrictions on travel. There are instances of buildings in the 12-16-ft. wide range being transported, and occasionally wider than 16 ft., but these are likely to be treated as superloads with very tight restrictions on when they can travel, what roads they can use, and that they must be accompanied by two or more escorts and possibly police escorts, etc.