

Technical Alert

Trailer Breakaway Systems



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According to ADR 38/02: *Every trailer having a 'Gross Trailer Mass' over 2 tonnes must be equipped with an efficient 'Emergency Brake System' which will cause immediate automatic application of its 'Brakes' in the event of the trailer accidentally becoming disconnected from the drawing vehicle. 'Brakes' so applied must remain applied for at least 15 minutes.*

In addition to this rule, some states (ACT and Victoria) also require that the brakes must hold the trailer stationary on a 12% gradient for this specified amount of time. In New South Wales, there is an additional requirement that the charge condition of the trailers on board breakaway system battery can be monitored from within the towing vehicle, as well as be charged whilst travelling by the tow vehicle. As this is a State based regulation, this is only applicable to trailers being registered in NSW.

Caravan Dealerships and Service Providers in particular need to aware of this regulation and must periodically check the functionality of these systems.

A number of inspections carried out recently on several older model caravans has proven that many of these vehicles no longer have a fully functional breakaway system. If for some unforeseen reason the trailer detaches completely from the tow vehicle, the **SAFETY** of the occupants of the tow vehicle and other road users, is relying completely on this breakaway system functioning correctly.

Simply pressing the "TEST" button on the Breakaway Unit is not an adequate test of this system.

Caravan Dealerships and Service Providers **MUST** at least check the following aspects of the breakaway system when carrying out a routine mechanical service or similar:

Breakaway Systems dedicated Battery

- Is the battery sufficiently charged to apply the trailer brakes for at least 15 minutes?
- Is the dedicated breakaway systems battery capable of receiving some form of charge?

Breakaway System Switch



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- When the pin is pulled out of the drawbar mounted switch, are the trailer's brakes applied?
- Is the coiled cord or similar attached to the switch pin frayed or damaged in any way which may affect its performance?
- Trace the electrical wiring from the switch into the drawbar and inspect the wiring and connections for damage or wear.
- Inspect the switch (where possible) for damage or indications of excessive rust – this will cause the switch to seize or become faulty over time.
- Is the pin itself in good condition? Has it snapped or is it becoming brittle over time from sun exposure?



We as an industry understand that the consumer also needs to take some responsibility and check this system regularly, however, as industry professionals it is our responsibility to inspect and maintain systems such as these as part of routine checks and maintenance services.

Caravan Dealerships also have an obligation to educate the consumer about these important safety features on handover. Ensure that the consumer knows how the entire breakaway system works including how to check the built in battery and how to physically apply the brakes by pulling the pin out of the A-Frame mounted switch.

Caravan Industry Association of Australia will be releasing a publication to consumers on the importance of checking these types of systems in the coming weeks.