

From the Office of the Sheriff:

Last week I was driving my SUV and towing a trailer when a citizen pointed out that my trailer lights were not working. I like most folks, when you make that light connection you make various assumptions. Mine was that they worked. I was wrong. The following day I was asked by another citizen what the regulations were in regards to trailer lights and if they are necessary.

I could only reply that mine don't work but I would conduct some research and provide the answers in my next column. I referred to Trans 305.55, Lighting devices. Trans 305 defines Standards for Vehicle Equipment and is part of the Wisconsin Administrative Code for the Department of Transportation. I didn't find the answer.

I then referred to State Statute Chapter 347 Equipment of Vehicles and found a wealth of information regarding trailers. 347.13 states that "no person shall operate a motor vehicle or trailer upon a highway during hours of darkness unless so equipped with at least one taillight mounted to the rear and emits a red light visible from 500 feet." If the vehicle/trailer is equipped with two tail lights, both must be in working condition. The same holds true for stop lamps, which must be controlled from the driver's seat of the propelling vehicle.

Chapter 347.15 states that trailers must have direction signal lamps. The only exception is if the signals of the towing unit are visible from 300 feet during normal sunlight in all directions from the driver's seat of the vehicle following. However, if the distance between the steering post to the rear of the trailer or load is 14 feet or more you must have directionals. Chapter 347.16 goes on to say that each trailer shall carry two reflectors, one of each side. Reflectorized material extending across the full width of the vehicle/trailer may be used in lieu of the reflectors.

How about those guys with the lumber hanging out the back of those pickup trucks? Chapter 347.20 states that no person shall operate on a highway during the hours of darkness any vehicle with a load or fixture extending more than four feet beyond the rear of the bed or body unless there is displayed at the extreme end, a red lamp visible from 500 feet. During hours other than darkness there must be a 12" square red flag or cloth.

Chapter 347.22 states that all farm tractors and self-propelled farm implements operating upon a highway during hours of darkness shall have head lamps and tail lamps. The only lamp that may be showing to the rear must be red. Slow moving vehicle signs are explained in Chapter 347.245. It states that any and all vehicles operating at speeds less than 25 mph must have a SMV emblem displayed. This is in addition to the required lamps. Each and every towed vehicle must also be so equipped unless the SMV upon the towing unit is visible from the rear. It is illegal to display a SMV on a roadway, mailbox, or be used as a clearance marker for wide loads. Road machinery is exempt from this requirement.

I hope this information helps you. It was a good refresher for me as I must get home and work on my own trailer lights. See you at the fair, thanks for listening [tnehls@co.dodge.wi.us](mailto:tnehls@co.dodge.wi.us). All previous columns can be accessed at [www.dodgecountysheriff.com](http://www.dodgecountysheriff.com) link Sheriff Columns.