



# Safety Shorts

## General Safety, Highway, & Law Enforcement

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## March is National Nutrition Month

“Let thy food be thy medicine,” said Hippocrates (a long, long time ago), but the sentiment still rings true. National Nutrition Month, celebrated in March, stresses the importance of a balanced diet and exercise. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics promotes the transformative powers of healthy food choices.

When we eat real, nourishing foods, we’re getting a wealth of vitamins and minerals that support not only healthy internal function, but give skin, hair, and nails an extra glow. Look good, feel good.

For more information: <https://nationaltoday.com/national-nutrition-month/>

### LAW ENFORCEMENT AND CORRECTIONS

**By Todd Duncan, Law Enforcement and Safety Specialist**

#### **Law Enforcement Agency Accreditation, A Risk Management Tool**

Achieving agency accreditation through the Nebraska Commission on Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice is more than an exercise in best practices — it is a statutory requirement under Nebraska Revised Statute §81-1414.18. This mandate requires that every law enforcement agency be accredited in a manner approved by the Commission. Agencies must meet prescribed criteria, including the adoption of written policies and other requirements determined by the Commission. Non-compliance not only risks exclusion from important funding sources, such as loans, grants, or donations administered by the Commission, but also exposes agencies to increased legal liabilities and public scrutiny. As of today, roughly two-thirds of sheriff’s offices in the NIRMA pool have been accredited.

#### **Risk and Liability Implications**

Accreditation demonstrates an agency’s commitment to meeting basic, nationally recognized standards. By ensuring that policies and procedures are aligned with best practices, accredited agencies benefit in several ways:

- **Reduced Liability:** Consistent, documented policies and procedures lower the risk of lawsuits and allegations of misconduct. Courts may view accredited agencies as having met rigorous standards, thereby mitigating liability exposure.
- **Enhanced Public Trust:** Accreditation enhances credibility, thereby fostering stronger community relations and confidence in law enforcement practices.

- **Financial Benefits:** Only accredited agencies are eligible for state-administered funding, grants, and other financial support.

Without accreditation, agencies risk not only legal and financial consequences but also damage to their reputation, which can further erode public trust and cooperation.

### **Steps to Achieve Accreditation in Nebraska**

1. **Application and Self-Assessment:** Agencies must first submit an [application/submission cover letter form](#) and the required documentation to the Commission. This process includes a simple self-assessment against established accreditation standards.
2. **Policy and Procedure Alignment:** Agencies are required to adopt certain basic written policies and procedures as dictated by statute and the Commission. This includes guidelines on use of force, training, and internal accountability. Model policies that satisfy Nebraska accreditation requirements are available through NIRMA.
3. **Data Submission:** Agencies are required to show compliance with data submission requirements such as traffic stops, deaths in custody, use of force, etc. Depending on the report, submission may be required monthly, bimonthly, or annually.
4. **Commission Review:** The Commission reviews the agency accreditation application packet and determines whether the agency meets the necessary standards for accreditation.
5. **Maintenance and Reassessment:** Once accredited, agencies must continuously maintain compliance and participate in periodic reviews to ensure standards are upheld.

By meeting these requirements, Nebraska law enforcement agencies not only comply with statutory mandates but also ensure operational excellence, ultimately reducing risk and liability while enhancing community service.

Visit the Commission's [Agency Accreditation Center website](#) for more detailed information, including the Commission's Accreditation Program Manual (step-by-step guide on the accreditation process). Questions regarding accreditation may be directed to [ncc.accredit@nebraska.gov](mailto:ncc.accredit@nebraska.gov).

For questions or more information on training opportunities, contact NIRMA's Law Enforcement and Safety Specialist Todd Duncan at (402) 742-9220 or [tduncan@nirma.info](mailto:tduncan@nirma.info).

# **GENERAL SAFETY**

**By Chad Engle, Loss Prevention and Safety Manager**

## **Safety Committees and Money for Minutes**

Money for Minutes winners have been announced, and Money for Minutes awards totaling \$7,000 have been distributed. Congratulations to the winners, they will be recognized in upcoming Interchange articles.

I wanted to take this last opportunity to encourage NIRMA members to be sure to get that first safety committee meeting on the calendar before the end of March. The upcoming budget has not yet been considered by the NIRMA Board, but if funding is approved for the Money for Minutes program, you must act now to be eligible for the drawing. Qualifying is simple, hold at least one safety committee meeting each quarter, and during the meeting discuss any accidents/injuries/events that happened during the previous quarter and develop recommendations to prevent recurrence of similar incidents, then submit those minutes to [chad@nirma.info](mailto:chad@nirma.info). If you miss the first quarter, you are out of luck, and you cannot win if you do not play.

Some interesting statistics that I would like to share: 45 member safety committees submitted at least four sets of minutes for calendar year 2024. The good news is that this is up 22% over last year, kudos to those members that support and protect their employees with an active loss prevention program. The bad news is that NIRMA is comprised of 113 members that are all required by the Nebraska Department of Labor to have a safety committee and less than half of them do. I know that we are all busy, but NIRMA has member committees that meet every other month and members that meet monthly and accomplish something meaningful by doing so. I am comfortable saying that if loss prevention and employee safety are important to your organization, you can find the time to meet at least once per quarter.

It is also important to note that only 39 of the 45 committees that submitted at least four sets of minutes qualified for the chance to receive an award. It is essential to note in your committee's minutes what incidents were discussed and what recommendations were made to prevent recurrence. Simply having the meetings does not mean that a committee will qualify. If there were no events to discuss simply include that in the minutes instead. When there are not any incidents to discuss, which is a good thing, I urge the committee to discuss near misses or some other safety moment that a member encountered recently. I shared with our committee a recent event where I lost traction on black ice on the interstate. That really got my attention, so it made sense to share it with others.

This spring I will be setting up meetings with safety committees and safety chairpersons to discuss NIRMA's Best Safety Practices and the loss prevention resources provided to NIRMA members. My initial focus will be on those members that did not meet during 2024. I look forward to working with you all during the upcoming year. As always, if you feel that I can be of assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me at [chad@nirma.info](mailto:chad@nirma.info) or 1.800.642.6671. Take care and be safe.

# **HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT**

**By K C Pawling, Road Safety and Loss Prevention Specialist**

## **Gravel Hauling and Nebraska's Load Securement Law**

Nebraska law requires that motor carriers, which include county road departments, secure their loads properly to prevent items from falling off or shifting during transit. This issue frequently arises for commercial vehicles, including trucks and trailers used by our road departments. The primary goal of these laws is to ensure safe road use for both the truck operator and other motorists. Further, the state's regulations apply to a wide range of cargo types, from construction materials and equipment, to agricultural products, and even gravel or dirt.

Nebraska's load securement laws are enforced by state and local law enforcement officers who conduct roadside inspections to ensure compliance. Drivers are required to adhere to specific guidelines to prevent unsecured cargo from endangering other drivers or causing accidents.

### **Key Load Securement Requirements in Nebraska**

The topic of load securement is addressed in both Nebraska state statute and federal rules promulgated by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA). The federal rules are designed to create consistency across the United States and are enforced by state agencies such as the Nebraska State Patrol. Below are some key aspects of load securement requirements applicable to our county road department personnel operating commercial motor vehicles in Nebraska:

1. **Securing Cargo:** Nebraska law requires that all cargo be properly secured to prevent movement during transport. This includes ensuring that the load cannot shift, topple, or fall off the vehicle. The load must be secured with appropriate tie-downs, ropes, chains, or other securing devices. The method of securing cargo must be sufficient to withstand both the forces encountered during transit and any sudden stops or maneuvers.
2. **Proper Use of Tie-Downs:** The state law mirrors federal regulations in specifying that tie-downs must be sufficient for various cargo types. For example, heavy cargo like construction equipment or steel must be secured using stronger chains or straps. Lighter cargo, such as bags of grain or pallets of goods, may require lighter securing methods but must still be secured adequately. The number of tie-downs must be sufficient to meet weight limits, preventing the load from shifting or becoming unstable. The FMCSA Cargo Securement Rules contain more specifics.
3. **Inspection of Securement:** In order to comply with Nebraska law, truck operators should inspect their cargo before departure and periodically during the trip. This includes checking that the tie-downs remain tight, secure, and in good condition. Drivers must also inspect their loads after any significant stops or at regular intervals, particularly for longer trips. Failure to ensure that the load remains properly secured throughout the journey is a violation of state law.
4. **Protection from Falling Cargo:** Here is where we start talking about tarping our county trucks. Like federal laws, Nebraska requires that loose cargo or debris be fully contained or covered. If materials could potentially spill, fall, or blow off the vehicle, they must be covered with tarps or other appropriate coverings. This is particularly

important for loads such as gravel, sand, or other loose materials, as these could pose a significant hazard to other drivers if not properly contained.

5. **Penalty for Non-Compliance:** Truck operators who fail to properly secure their loads may face fines, citations, or other penalties under Nebraska state law. The severity of penalties can depend on the specific violation and the potential danger posed by the unsecured or contained load. For example, if an unsecured load causes a road hazard or accident, the penalties may be higher, and the county could also be held liable for civil damages for injury to property or persons caused by the failure to keep cargo secured. Keep in mind that gravel blowing from a county gravel truck that is not tarped is a non-compliance issue.

### **Enforcement and Inspections**

Nebraska's load securement law is enforced through regular inspections conducted by law enforcement officers. These inspections are part of routine safety checks on commercial vehicles, and officers may inspect the securement of a vehicle's load as part of these checks. In addition, the Nebraska State Patrol is often involved in ensuring compliance with these regulations, conducting roadside checks for potential violations.

During inspections, law enforcement officers will assess whether the cargo is adequately secured, whether the appropriate tie-downs are in place, and if the load is properly covered, where necessary. If a violation is found, the officer may issue the driver a citation or fine, and the driver may be required to take corrective action before continuing the journey.

Keep in mind that it may not be common for carrier enforcement to do routine checks on county owned equipment, but you are NOT EXEMPT from securement laws, or any transportation laws regarding commercial vehicles.

### **Conclusion**

Nebraska's load securement statutes play a crucial role in ensuring the safety of both truck drivers and other road users. Drivers and trucking companies must be diligent in adhering to these regulations to avoid incidents and contribute to safer roads. Ensuring proper load securement is not just a legal obligation, but a driver's responsibility that helps keep Nebraska's roadways safe for everyone. Take the time after loading and tarping at the gravel pit to walk around the truck, brushing off any loose material that may be on the truck.

The Nebraska Revised Statute can be found at §60-6,304, and the federal rules can be found at <https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/regulations/cargo-securement/cargo-securement-rules>. If you have any questions I can help you with, please let me know. [kcpawling@nirma.info](mailto:kcpawling@nirma.info) or 402-310-4417.