

Safety Bulletin 01 of 2026

Trailer Detachment During Coupling

Location: Elizabeth Terminal

Date of Issue 11/05/2026
Incident Date 12/01/2026
Location Elizabeth Terminal – Trailer Compound
Injury / Damage No injury; trailer damage only

Incident Summary

At approximately 11:00am, a driver attended the Elizabeth Terminal trailer compound to collect a trailer. The tractor unit reversed and connected to the trailer and the airlines were connected. The driver pulled away believing the 5th wheel was correctly engaged. During an initial right-hand turn, the trailer detached from the tractor unit. The driver immediately stopped and reported the incident.

Outcome

No injuries sustained. Damage to trailer only

Immediate Cause

The 5th wheel coupling was not fully engaged/locked, resulting in separation during movement.

Root cause analysis

1) Failure to verify coupling engagement

No effective visual confirmation of locked 5th wheel jaws

No or ineffective tug test prior to movement

2) Process / procedural

Ports of Jersey SOPs do not explicitly mandate a coupling verification step prior to move-off. Logistic companies are to ensure that their SOP's reflect this process.

Industry context

The UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE) notes that coupling and uncoupling incidents occur frequently when safe coupling and parking **procedures are not** followed, and recommends visual lock checks and a pull (tug) test as part of the coupling procedure.

Industry safety commentary on unplanned uncoupling describes partial jaw engagement and missed verification checks as common factors in yard-based separations.

Serious incidents, including fatalities, have led to renewed warnings about strict compliance with recognised coupling procedures.

Key Risk

A detached trailer can become an uncontrolled hazard and may lead to serious injury or fatality, significant asset damage, and operational disruption.

Recommended Safety Controls

1) Mandatory Coupling Verification

Drivers **MUST NOT** move any vehicle until all of the following are completed:

Visual check: 5th wheel jaws fully closed around kingpin; no visible gaps between plate and trailer.

Physical check: tug test carried out with trailer brakes applied.

2) Standardised Coupling Procedure

Reinforce full coupling sequence: reverse and engage; apply parking brake; visual inspection of lock; conduct tug test; connect airlines and electrics; final walk-around check; only then move off.

3) Toolbox Talk (Immediate Action)

Deliver a toolbox talk to all drivers covering: coupling and uncoupling procedure; importance of tug test + visual checks; risks of partial engagement; and incident learnings.

4) Driver Accountability

Reinforce individual responsibility for vehicle checks, safe coupling, and prompt reporting of defects/incidents.

KEY SAFETY MESSAGE

If you haven't visually confirmed **AND** physically tested the coupling — it is **NOT** safe.