

Safety Spotlight



Private Bridges

Guidelines & Safety Tips for Safe Delivery

Every day, trucks travel over privately owned bridges to deliver products to customers. Over time, these bridges can deteriorate due to age, corrosion, rot, and flooding.

Many of these bridges were built decades ago when vehicles were smaller and lighter and now may not be able to handle bigger vehicles that are heavier.



Key Considerations

Before crossing a private bridge, several factors should be evaluated:

- **Vehicle Weight Rating:** Inquire into the bridge's vehicle weight rating if possible.
- **Bridge Condition:** If the weight rating is unknown, a company representative should inspect the bridge with the customer to assess its general condition and safety.

Potential Risks

Damage to private bridges can result in:

- *Thousands of dollars in repair costs.*
- *Injuries to drivers.*
- *Damage to the bridge and vehicle.*
- *Environmental damage from spilled products like gasoline or diesel.*

Guidelines/Safety Tips:

New Customer Inquiry

- When engaging with new customers, ask if they have a private bridge.
- Inquire about the bridge's gross vehicle weight limit and overall condition. Most private bridges do not have posted weight limits, but it is best to find out if the customer knows what it is, or if they have it posted.
- Ask if any maintenance has been performed on the bridge.

Pre-Crossing Inspection

- Before crossing for the first time, consider having a company representative inspect the bridge. This inspection is not equivalent to a structural engineer's evaluation but, it can provide a general sense of the bridge's condition.
- If there are any concerns, request the customer to have the bridge inspected or refrain from delivering to that customer.

Flooding

One of the primary causes of safety issues for bridges is due to flooding. Even though you may have crossed over a bridge many times, recent flooding may have compromised the integrity of the bridge. This is something to definitely consider in your pre-delivery plans.

Load Management

Consider delivering a reduced load or using a smaller vehicle to minimize weight.

Weight Limit Adherence

Ensure all drivers are aware of and comply with posted or known weight limits before crossing. Note specifics into the customer's records so when deliveries are scheduled, any of the restrictions are communicated to the driver.

Driver Discretion

Drivers should avoid crossing a private bridge if they do not feel safe.

Responsibility Clarification

Inform customers they will be responsible for any damage to your vehicle and the bridge when crossing.

Legal Protections

Consider including contractual provisions—such as indemnification and release of liability clauses—in your lease and/or delivery agreements to address bridge-related risks. Contractual provisions could address, among other things, the responsibility for:

- Ensuring that any driveway or pathway used for vehicular traffic is safe and adequate to accommodate the weight of a delivery or service vehicle.
- Reimbursing incomplete delivery costs, if safe and unimpeded access is not provided for the delivery or service vehicle across a customer-owned bridge or driveway.

Before including any contractual provisions in your agreements, consider having them reviewed by your legal counsel.

By following these guidelines, you can help ensure the safety of your drivers and your assets when having to cross private bridges.

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