



# Can you find 10 safety hazards in the **trailer-loading** **scene** below?

By PETE LICHAU with JESSICA HEIN · Photography by JESSICA HEIN

**A**t some point, you might have to transport your Paint Horse, and that means you'll have to load him into a trailer. Trailers can be intimidating to a horse, and that's just one more reason to make sure you load him as safely as possible.

Look at the picture below, and find 10 safety hazards that make this trailer-loading scene dangerous. Then, turn the page and see if you're right—and learn how you can create a safer situation.



j  
zone



## Safety Hazards

Loading in a trailer is a very unnatural situation for a horse—they don't live in caves and can't see directly in front of them very well. In this picture, there are three disconnected people expecting their horses to load. Everybody is doing something that they think is helping, but by doing so, nothing is working. You want your horse to respond to a situation, not react to one. If he was to react to any one of those people, yes he might get into that trailer, but it would be simply a self-preserving reaction instead of a calm response to an open-ended invitation.

### 1 Loose Horse in the Trailer

The horse in the first trailer stall is not secured—the partition is closed, but he's not tied or clipped by his halter. He can get into trouble in a number of ways: turning his head around backwards, bumping his head on the window or sticking his head too far out. Being secured doesn't completely prevent possible problems, but it greatly diminishes the chance of one occurring.

### 2 Climbing Inside

John-Michael is leaning in through the window, trying to entice the loading horse with treats; however, he has more chance of spooking the horse than helping him load.

### 3 Horse Poorly Tied

This mare is tied too long with a knot that won't slip free if she panics. She could also slip on the asphalt, or swing her hindquarters around and kick the loading horse.

### 4 Door Latch

This trailer's door latch is sticking out, and it could gouge the gelding as he loads. The horse might feel like he needs to maneuver around the latch, and it could be enough to make him not get in the trailer at all.

### 5 No Bedding Material

When you're hauling horses, it's a good idea to use bedding—shavings or straw, perhaps. It keeps your horse from slipping on slick rubber floor mats and makes the trailer more inviting by lightening up the area.

### 6 Poor Loading Location

This trailer is poorly parked, with a large, uneven step from asphalt. This horse could easily slip on

the asphalt, and the large gap from ground to trailer might make him consider jumping into the trailer, which could be dangerous. Ideally, you want a low, level step with natural footing, like dirt or grass.

### 7 Pulling the Horse

Rachel is giving her horse mixed signals: facing him says "I'm here and you're there; respect my space," but she's also pulling him into her space. To the horse, his choices are to refuse or jump in the trailer on top of Rachel. She's also not wearing gloves—if her horse pulled back, the lead rope could burn her bare hands.

### 8 Loose Halter

An ill-fitting halter can't signal properly, and in this case, if the horse put his head down, the halter could catch on the door latch. This halter is so loose it looks like it could slip off of his nose, and if that happens, the horse is loose.

### 9 Swinging Door

This trailer door is unsecured, and any number of things—the rocking of the trailer, the loading of the horse, a gust of wind—could cause it to swing and possibly scare or injure the horse.

### 10 Scaring the Horse

Emily is trying to scare the horse into the trailer by standing behind him and flapping her arms. Acting like a spooky, scary thing on the outside puts her at risk of being kicked—and scaring a horse into the trailer is also poor horsemanship.

# Safer Solutions

Working with horses is often about efficiency vs. effectiveness. Although pulling or spooking or coaxing with treats could be effective in getting a horse to load, it's not efficient because the horse doesn't understand the cue-response. The next time he has to get into the trailer, what if there's nobody there to spook him in? Efficiency is our goal when working with livestock: you want your horse to respond to a situation, not react to one.

This time, everybody is working together. John-Michael is holding the trailer door so it doesn't hit Rachel's loading horse, and he's also holding the third horse. Emily is attending to the horse already in the trailer, making sure he's calm and secured with a trailer tie. After all of the horses are loaded and secure, these children will shut the trailer windows to limit dust, debris and forced air blowing on their horses' heads, which will make trailering a more comfortable and safe experience for the animals.

The trailer is now more inviting: shavings provide traction and help lighten the dark space, and the trailer is more balanced, with a lower step from natural footing. Before loading her horse, Rachel put on gloves. She made sure his halter fit correctly and secured his lead rope over his neck. With the lead rope in her left hand, she has led her Paint to the trailer

and is encouraging him to calmly step inside—she's using a bamboo rod to help coax him into the trailer, but she's certainly not scaring him. Gently tapping on his hindquarter is similar to putting your leg on a horse while riding and having it move forward—the horse understands moving away from pressure. As he stepped inside, Rachel released the lead rope, allowing the gelding to load. All three Youth are working in sync with each other—everybody's looking at the job that they're doing and paying attention.

You want to make loading into the trailer as much of an invitation as you can. Here, everybody is doing the best they can to make the trailer inviting with their posture, positioning and general attitude. You can see the effect in the horse, as well: his head has dropped and he's casually walking into what he considers an inviting situation. [PHC](#)

Jessica Hein is managing editor of the Paint Horse Connection. To comment on this article, email [jhein@apha.com](mailto:jhein@apha.com).

Pete Lichau is an APHA member, as well as owner of Rose Gate Farm ([rosegatefarm.com](http://rosegatefarm.com)) in Argyle, Texas. Special thanks to John-Michael Cree, Emily Graycheck and Rachel Westmoreland for their help illustrating this article.

