

SUBJECT: Requiring safety chains to tow trailers for agricultural purposes

COMMITTEE: Transportation — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 5 ayes — Krusee, Phillips, Deshotel, Hamric, West
0 nays
4 absent — Callegari, Casteel, Flores, Hill

WITNESSES: For — Lee E. Jackson; Karen C. Love ; Cynthia Love Stephenson; Boyd Waggoner
Against — None

BACKGROUND: Safety chains of a type approved by the Texas Department of Transportation must be used when a passenger car or light truck is drawing a trailer, semitrailer, house trailer, or another motor vehicle. Under Transportation Code, sec. 545.410(a), the chains must be properly attached and strong enough to maintain the connection between the drawing vehicle and the trailer, semitrailer, house trailer, or motor vehicle being pulled. Current law exempts trailers or semitrailers being used for agricultural purposes.

DIGEST: HB 372 would lift the exemption for trailers and semitrailers being drawn for agricultural purposes by passenger cars or light trucks.
The bill would take effect September 1, 2005.

SUPPORTERS SAY: Safety chains help ensure that if the drawing vehicle becomes detached from the trailer or vehicle, the trailer or vehicle does not entirely separate from the towing vehicle. The detachment of a trailer or vehicle from the vehicle drawing it could create a hazardous situation in which a collision could occur.
HB 372 would prevent serious injuries and deaths. Serious injuries and deaths can result from collisions involving detached trailers or motor vehicles regardless of whether they are being drawn for non-agricultural or agricultural purposes.

Safety chains are easily accessible and affordable. Even small farmers could afford them without significant expense. Buying a safety chain to draw a trailer or semitrailer would not be a substantial investment when balanced with the benefits to public safety.

HB 372 also could help stem a growing problem of people buying farm tags for vehicles that should display normal tags. Many have the misconception that displaying farm tags instead of regular tags, they can tow trailers and semitrailers without a safety chain under the agricultural exception. Because farm tags are half the price of regular tags, insincere purchases of farm tags cheat the system of deserved revenue.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

The law should continue to provide exceptions for the unique situation of small farmers towing for agricultural purposes. Safety chains could prove costly to small farmers, who often are limited by tight budgets and cannot easily afford additional equipment.

NOTES:

The companion bill, SB 176 by Brimer, was reported favorably, as substituted, by the Senate Transportation and Homeland Security Committee on March 22 and recommended for the Local and Uncontested Calendar.