

# Safety Alert OF THE MONTH

PLEASE PASS THIS ON TO PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS IN BC'S FOREST INDUSTRY

October 2019

## Extracting and Towing Vehicles

It is very stressful when a vehicle breaks down or gets stuck. Not only do these situations cost time and money but if towing or extracting the vehicle is not done properly, it may lead to serious injuries or even death. Earlier this year a loaded logging truck was being towed through a muddy section of a landing when the chain used for the tow snapped, causing it to whip back at the truck shattering the window. Luckily there were no injuries.

This *Alert of the Month* provides some considerations to think about when you are faced with having to tow a vehicle such as trucks, heavy equipment and light vehicles. These 10 points may seem like common sense, but keep in mind most incidents occur when one or more of these considerations are ignored. If care is taken in the basics, the chance of injury to workers or damage to equipment can be reduced significantly.

### 1. Remain calm

As frustrating as a stuck vehicle can be, it is important to remain calm. You will be in a better mindset to be able to figure out the problem and will make fewer mistakes.

### 2. Come up with a plan and communicate it effectively

Make sure that everyone involved knows what is going to happen and agrees on signals, timing and the direction of the tow. Determine whether the towing driver will stop as soon as the stuck vehicle is clear, or will continue to pull the vehicle to the complete safety of solid ground.



### 3. Unload to reduce weight if possible

In some cases it may be a good idea to lighten the load of the stuck vehicle. As this may increase, or create new hazards, unloading should only be considered if it can be done safely.

### 4. Make sure your recovery equipment is right for the job and properly rated



It is best practice to use recovery straps of the appropriate weight rating when extracting stuck vehicles. When towing another vehicle, tow ropes or chain may be used. Regardless of the tool, you must confirm that it has a tag or that you know its strength rating. This includes any attachments, such as hooks or shackles, as these points are often the first to fail. The recovery equipment should be rated 2-3 times the stuck vehicle weight. Never use



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equipment unless you know it can handle the job. Damaged recovery equipment may break and cause injury or damage.

## 5. Make sure attachment points will hold under tension

If possible, it is usually best to attach the recovery equipment to a tow hook or to the frame of the vehicle. Do not hook to the bumper as this may pull away. Avoid attaching to a tow hitch as these systems are not meant to be used in this way and may not be strong enough to withstand extracting the stuck vehicle.

## 6. Place something heavy on the strap, chain, cable, or rope

Placing cable blankets (also called winch blankets/dampers) or something similar, such as a heavy jacket, on the strap, cable, rope or chain will assist in forcing the device toward the ground instead of up in the air if it breaks.



## 7. Remove non-essential people from the danger zone

Extra people in the area increase the chance that someone will be injured. Those not directly involved in the tow or extraction must move to a safe location. This will reduce confusion and reduce the risk of miscommunication between the towing vehicle and the vehicle being towed.

All people directly involved in the extraction must either be in the vehicle, or alternately, out of the bite and well clear of the recovery equipment.

## 8. Apply power slowly and smoothly

Take the slack out of the towing equipment before you start the towing process. If you are using a recovery strap, you can try jerking on them to give a little extra punch to move the vehicle. Once freed, ensure that the vehicle is in sound mechanical condition prior to putting it back in service.

## 9. Store your recovery equipment properly

Keep straps, chains, cables and ropes properly maintained and stored safely. This will ensure that the equipment is protected from damage and will be effective when needed. Clearly mark chain ratings for future reference when storing chains. Clean equipment after use to help maintain it for next time.

## 10. Know when to call for help

And finally, know when a situation is beyond your ability or capability of your resources and call for help! While having a heavy towing and extraction specialist come to a remote work site may be expensive, the specialized equipment and training will increase safety and may prevent injuries to personnel and damage to equipment.

