

# **Tow Truck Operator Certification Study Guide**

**Customer Service  
Safety  
TDLR Regulations  
Incident Management  
Private Property  
Truck & Equipment  
Light Duty Towing & Recovery  
11.21/23**



# Customer Service

As the old saying goes, "We are nothing without our customers", it holds truer today than at any other time. What makes a towing company rise above its competition is the quality of service provided to its customers by the tow operator.

You as a tow truck operator are the front-line representative of your company. Your **appearance, attitude, professionalism, and knowledge** create impressions of your company. This section will deal with each of these impressions in detail.

## **Appearance.....**

Appearance includes.....**yourself and your truck**

Customers enjoy doing business with tow truck operators that are clean and wearing a uniform that identifies not only the operator but includes the company that they work for. The first thing a professional does when approaching a customer is to offer to shake hands and identify himself and his company. No one likes to shake a hand that is grimy. A professional will wear a clean, fresh uniform at the beginning of each shift. Avoid such clothing that depicts alcohol, tobacco, sexual overtones, etc. These do not leave a good impression on the customer.

The appearance of your truck also creates an impression. It signifies your pride or lack of it in yourself and your work. A clean exterior and interior are a must in gaining customer confidence and respect. The interior should be clean and free of grease and dirt. It should be clean enough for your family to ride in. The exterior should be maintained as the weather will allow. Your paperwork should be organized and stored so as to allow a customer to ride in comfort and safety. This means keeping the floor of the truck free of tools, trash, fast food packages, and equipment that should be stored properly elsewhere on the truck. Equipment in the work area of the truck should be secured in the proper locations.

## **Attitude.....**

The attitude of a tow operator is as important as his skills in towing. A veteran tower that has years of experience and knowledge but does not have a positive attitude when dealing with a customer, creates a negative image in the customer's mind.

The tower that argues with the customer, uses inappropriate language, bad mouths the competition, blames his equipment, etc., makes the customer want to call someone else the next time a towing service is needed. Do not expect referrals from this customer if you do not demonstrate a friendly, positive attitude.

As stated earlier, the professional tower will smile, make eye contact, offer to shake hands and identify himself when approaching the customer. Ask the customer to

explain the problem that the vehicle has. **LISTEN** to what the customer is telling you. **ASK** for clarification if you do not understand completely what the customer is trying to relate to you. The professional tower will demonstrate a sincere attitude towards helping the customer solve a problem.

Take time to **explain** to the customer your plan of action and confirm that the customer understands what you will be doing. Make sure that you get confirmation from the customer as to the **desired destination** of the vehicle.

After you have completed the previous steps, load the vehicle using safe, accepted techniques that will put the customer at ease and be confident that you are respecting both the vehicle and the customer. Never take chances when loading the vehicle.

Before departing, THANK the customer and explain the paperwork and get the signatures needed to transport the vehicle.

### **Professionalism.....**

A lot of things have been written about what a customer wants and how to please them. You as a professional can ensure the customer will feel at ease and confident about you and your company. To be brief, customers want to:

- Be Informed
- Keep their self-esteem
- Know the plan
- Be treated fairly
- Be treated friendly
- Understand
- Be dealt with honestly
- Be shown respect

A professional tower will also be aware of the skills needed to communicate successfully with customers.

- Listening
- Speaking
- Reading
- Writing

**Listening** is probably the MOST important skill a tower can have when dealing with people. It is a natural human trait to want to do all the talking but to provide quality service to our customers, we need to LISTEN as much or more than talk.

Listening will give you the information you need to complete the job without mistakes. Listening will also eliminate misunderstandings. If possible, eliminate distractions that can prevent you from hearing what the customer is saying. Repeat what the customer has told you to make sure that you clearly heard all the information given to you.

**Speaking** skills are necessary to ask questions, convey knowledge, explain, verify, and put the customer at ease. The professional will speak in a clear voice and use terms that the average customer will understand. This is extremely important when dealing with female customers. DO NOT talk down to a customer. Avoid assumptions. Do not assume that the customer knows what you are communicating. Verify that the customer understands what you are talking about. Maintain eye contact when speaking to a customer. You will be able to "read" the customer as to whether they understand everything you say.

**Reading** is also particularly important when dealing with customers. Major mistakes can be avoided by careful reading. This can save both you and the customer frustration, misunderstandings, and time.

**Writing** is as important as the other three skills. A tow operator MUST take the time to write clearly and legibly to eliminate misunderstandings and costly delays. Keep writing simply by using words that cannot be mistaken. **Always remember that what you WRITE can become a legal issue.**

In conclusion, how you deal with customers is the key to your success as a professional tow operator and the key to the financial well-being of the company that you represent.

## **Safety**

Our personal safety is learned through our childhood. Work safety is learned through being taught and experienced. As a professional tow operator safe working practices are a must if we want to get home safely to our families.

**Safety is a STATE OF MIND!**

It's one thing to say that we practice safety in our work, but do we THINK, DRIVE, & WORK safety at all times?

This chapter deals with three areas of safety that we should always keep foremost in our mind.....

- **Personal safety**
- **Driving/Work safety**

Personal safety includes the following subjects.....

**Health, Drug & Alcohol knowledge, Infectious Diseases.** We will cover each area separately.

### **Health.....**

The towing industry is a physically demanding career. Long hours, extreme physical demands, hot weather, cold weather, rain, and emotional stress can have adverse effects on a tow operator.

Just as your tow truck needs proper maintenance, so does your body. Proper diet is most important to the tower. Eating the right foods and the right amounts will aid in keeping the body fueled. Drinking the right fluids that contain electrolytes to replenish those lost through sweating in hot weather is critical for personal safety. A proper diet is crucial for keeping fit for the challenges a tower deals with every day. Skipping meals, snacking, and eating foods that are high in cholesterol and sugar should be avoided. Talk to your doctor or a dietician about what and how much you need to keep fit.

Heat-related illnesses such as dehydration, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke can be life-threatening. Symptoms including weakness, fatigue, cramps, profuse sweating, headache, dizziness, nausea, and vision problems can be warnings that you need to get help.

Cold weather conditions can also be life-threatening. Although not a common problem in Texas, frostbite can occur during long exposure to sub-freezing temperatures and windy conditions. *Hypothermia* can be life-threatening. Wear proper clothing AND A HAT when temperatures drop below freezing.

**Drug and Alcohol** awareness is extremely important to workplace safety. Both substances can have an adverse effect on safety.

### **Alcohol.....**

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has very definitive regulations against the use of alcohol before, during and after operating a commercial motor vehicle. Briefly stated the regulations say that "no driver shall use alcohol, or be under the influence of alcohol, within 4 hours before going on duty or operating, or having physical control of a commercial motor vehicle". However, that could be longer if a large quantity of alcohol were consumed. A violation of the regulations occurs when the blood alcohol content is 0.04 or higher. Severe penalties can be assessed when a driver tests positive for these amounts.

Alcohol consumption can affect.....

- **Reaction time**, an increase in total time required to respond to a situation.
- **Tracking**, keeping the vehicle in position on the roadway with respect to lanes, other vehicles, etc.
- **Vision**, the ability to perceive or detect an object in motion and control over eye movement and the ability to merge two images.
- **Comprehension**, the ability to perceive hazards, to take in what you see and hear.
- **Attention**, the ability to focus attention on one or more driving tasks.
- **Coordination**, skilled motor performance, and coordination as well as skills requiring high levels of precise movement.

According to TXDOT, in 2015 death toll was 3,531 out of which 960 people were killed in motor vehicle traffic crashes where a driver was under the influence of alcohol. This is 27% of the total number of people killed in motor vehicle traffic crashes.

### **Alcohol content.....**

Alcohol comes in a variety of beverages. Beer, wine, and liquor all have varying degrees of alcohol. 12 ounces of beer contain the same alcohol content as 5 ounces of wine and 1 ounce of liquor. Alcohol passes through the stomach into the smaller intestine where it is absorbed directly into the blood. On average, a typical drink containing .5 ounces of pure alcohol will increase the blood alcohol level of a 150 lb. man by about 0.02%. Alcohol is eliminated from the body at a constant rate of about .5 ounces per hour.

Because time is needed for alcohol to progress from the digestive tract to the rest of the body, a person's blood alcohol level (BAC) can continue to rise after he/she has stopped drinking. After a peak in BAC is reached, the amount of alcohol decreases slowly.

### **Symptoms of use.....**

**Odor on breath**, a person that has alcohol in his system cannot detect the odor on his own breath.

**Inability to maintain balance.** The person may sway from side to side or back and forth, shifting his feet using their arms for balance, leaning against walls or doorways, and showing an inability to stand without swaying.

**Slurred speech**, confusion, or taking a long time to answer or reply.

**General awareness** does the person act sleepy or stupor-like?

### **Drug usage.....**

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration also has strict regulations regarding the use of **controlled substances** before, during, and after operating a commercial

motor vehicle. For tow operators that are subject to these regulations, compliance is critical. Violations can be severe. In addition to the FMCSA having strict regulations, on a state level, the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation has laws in effect that ALL tow operators in Texas must comply with.

More regulations will be covered under the chapter on TDLR Regulations.

There are **5 controlled substances** that every driver should be aware of.....

**Amphetamines, Cocaine, Marijuana, Opiates, and Phencyclidine.** Even over-the-counter medication can have adverse effects on people, such as cold/cough medicine. Be careful when using these types of medications, follow the label instructions & watch for side effects.

Symptoms of usage include.....

- **Amphetamines**, hypersensitivity, dilated pupils, excessive talking
- **Cocaine**, mood swings, depression, bad breath, restlessness, irritability, running nose/nose bleeds.
- **Marijuana**, impaired vision, slowed reflexes, slowed thinking, memory loss, staring.
- **Opiates**, cold, moist, bluish skin; constricted pupils, memory loss, mood swings.
- **Phencyclidine**, increased blood pressure, delusions, confusion, panic, flashbacks, dry mouth.

Any amount of drug use can dramatically affect driving safety. Some of the effects are; risk-taking, overreaction, impaired judgment, aggressiveness, blurred vision, reduced concentration, distorted vision, and distorted time and distance. All of these are a danger when operating any type of vehicle.

### **Infectious Diseases.....**

A tow operator may come in contact with infectious diseases on a frequent basis. Due to the nature of our business, recovery work might necessitate that we are around blood. **Bloodborne Pathogens** can be a danger to the health of towers. These pathogens include HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), and HBV (hepatitis B). These diseases are transmitted primarily through blood.

Firefighters, police officers, EMTs, Paramedics, and tow operators can reasonably expect to come in contact with blood. All precautions when doing recovery work should be used by the professional tow operator. The use of disposable latex or rubber gloves should be a part of all tow operators' personal protective equipment. In addition, protective devices such as face shields, masks, eye protection, gowns, etc. should be available if needed. In addition, a tow operator should familiarize himself with the modes of transmission, symptoms, and warning signals, related to **bloodborne pathogens**. Knowledge of these diseases can save your life. Any time a tow operator thinks he/she may have been exposed to body fluids, or had skin punctured by a needle in a vehicle, he/she should immediately inform his/her

supervisor. It is important that the tow operator be very specific in their explanation of the exposure.

### **Driving Safety.....**

Safe driving skills are numerous. A professional tow operator will always demonstrate safe driving skills. The driver must be aware of many things that affect his/her safety and the public's safety. The following is a partial list of skills that are required to operate your truck safely.

- Truck inspection
- Knowledge of traffic laws
- Driving courteously
- Stopping distance
- Managing space
- Recognizing hazards
- Weather
- Mirror usage

### **Truck Inspection....**

Daily pre-trip inspections are a must to begin the day. The safe operation of your vehicle is of utmost importance and knowledge of the safe operating status of it will prevent delays, breakdowns, safety hazards, etc. Again, in reference to Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration regulations, every driver that operates a commercial motor vehicle will inspect all safety-related items on the vehicle. A list of items to be checked daily include, but are not limited to:

- Tires and rims
- Steering and steering components
- Brakes and brake components
- All lights and reflectors
- Fluid leaks
- Damage that may present a hazard to safe operation.
- Windshield wipers
- Horn
- Heater / defroster
- Belts & hoses
- Mirrors
- Fire extinguisher
- Suspension and components
- Exhaust system
- Air compressor and air lines if so equipped
- Axles
- Reflective triangles

- Battery
- Spare fuses

Also, any equipment that may be unique to your vehicle. Any defect that is found must be recorded and if determined to be a safety hazard, must be repaired before the vehicle is placed in operation.

At the end of your shift, the Vehicle Inspection Report (VIR) must be signed by the operator. If a defect was found that required immediate repairs, the person making the repairs must also sign the VIR.

### **Knowledge of traffic laws.....**

Always obey traffic laws. Traffic laws are posted everywhere. From stop signs to speed limit signs to construction signs to yield signs, there should be no reason for the professional tow operator not to obey traffic laws. Obeying traffic laws has many benefits.....lower insurance rates, improves public image, reduces accidents, no traffic fines, etc.

### **Driving courteously.....**

Tow operators that display a courteous attitude while driving create a positive image of themselves and the company they represent. All too often, discourteous drivers will have a negative effect on the motorists around them. The operator's actions or inactions can create attitudes in other drivers that can cause them to exhibit negative behaviors down the road. Discourteous driving can have a "snowball " effect that may result in one or more accidents by other drivers because they are now angry. Take the time to show that you are a professional.

### **Stopping distance.....**

Simply defined, stopping distance is the space needed to stop safely at a specific speed before colliding with another object. The professional tow operator should never "tailgate" because he knows that it takes a considerable distance to stop a tow truck, especially if it is loaded. Also, weather conditions can greatly increase stopping distance. Wet streets, icy or snow conditions have a huge effect on the distance it takes to stop any vehicle. Speed is another factor. The faster a vehicle is traveling; the more space is needed.

Heavy traffic can have an impact on stopping distance. Again, speed comes into play. Slower traffic tends to follow closer, increasing the potential for an accident. High speeds greatly increase the probability of a rear-end collision. Whenever speed doubles, it takes about four times as much distance to stop your vehicle. Limited visibility such as fog, snow, or heavy rain affects safe stopping distances.

### **There are three definitions that a professional driver needs to know.....**

- **Perception distance**.... the distance a vehicle travels from the moment you spot a hazard until you decide to apply the brake.
- **Reaction distance**...the distance a vehicle travels from the time you lift your foot off the accelerator until you apply the brake.
- **Braking distance**...the distance a vehicle travels after the brake is applied until it stops completely.

### **If a tow truck is loaded, these distances increase significantly!!!!**

All professional tow operators should know the "Four Second" rule. This rule is determined by observing the vehicle ahead of you and picking a fixed object that it passes. Count 1001, 1002, 1003, 1004. If you reached the fixed object before you hit 1004, you are following too close. This pertains to tow trucks that are not loaded and are on dry pavement.

### **Managing space.....**

Simply put, managing space is being aware of the "Big Picture". A professional operator will know what is going on around his truck. Not only will he/she know what is in front of them, but what is beside and behind his/her vehicle. The professional will position his truck in the middle traffic lane, constantly turning his head to detect traffic beside and behind and plan an "escape" route should one be necessary. Be constantly on the lookout for a vehicle that is tail-gating or hiding in the blind spot on each quarter panel.

A driver should constantly be scanning the space around his vehicle. As a rule, a driver should scan a city block ahead. No matter where you are driving, there sometimes occurs a hazard that you cannot avoid. If you are faced with the possibility of a head-on collision, steer to the right, even if it means the possible collision with an object to the side. It is better to glance at an object than to hit it head-on.

### **Recognizing hazards.....**

The Accident Prevention Formula developed by the National Safety Council can greatly reduce the chances of an accident when applied. The formula is.....

- Recognize all hazards
- Understand the defense
- Act correctly on time

Being aware at all times is the key.

### **Weather.....**

Texas weather can run from extremely hot to extremely cold. Each of these weather conditions presents its own safety hazards. During the hot Texas summers, heat can be detrimental to both the driver and the truck. Equipment such as tires can be adversely

affected by the heat. The professional tow operator should constantly check tires for tread wear, sidewall cracking, and air pressure.

Cold weather driving presents hazards such as wet surfaces, snow cover, and icy conditions. Braking, steering, hydroplaning, and maintaining control of the vehicle demands that the driver be constantly alert. The professional driver will be on the lookout for slick patches on bridges, shaded areas, and areas where lawn sprinklers are in use.

Spring and early summer storms can also be extremely dangerous. Heavy rains, lightning, and tornados can be a threat to the safe operation of a vehicle. Be on the lookout for low water crossings and avoid crossing when high water is present. Wet road surfaces cause many accidents due to drivers not slowing down to avoid hydroplaning. It only takes a small amount of water on the road for a vehicle to "float" above the road surface. Using brakes improperly when hydroplaning can cause loss of control of the vehicle. When a driver detects that his vehicle is hydroplaning, the best action is to get off the accelerator, slow down, and use the brake lightly.

### **Mirror Usage.....**

The three most important safety features on any vehicle are.....

- Steering controls
- Braking Systems
- Mirrors

Being able to see in all directions is as important to safety as any other feature of a vehicle. Proper use and setting of mirrors are a major concern for the professional tow operator. Every tow truck should have serviceable mirrors on each side of the vehicle. These mirrors should be adjusted to enable the driver to see the traffic lanes on both sides of the vehicle. Being able to see the traffic lanes on both sides allows the driver to be able to maneuver and change lanes safely. They are also essential for safe backing. More and more large trucks are installing "cross-over" mirrors like those used on school buses. These "cross-over" mirrors allow a driver to see everything that is hidden from view by the hood and fenders. A professional driver will constantly be turning his head from side to side, checking mirrors for hazards.

## **Texas Department of License and Regulation**

In the 2007 Texas Legislature, house bill 2094 was passed into law. This bill dramatically changed the towing industry in Texas. The bill moved operating authority from TXDOT to TDLR. It not only impacted the towing industry, but TDLR now regulates Vehicle Storage Facilities also. The state statute that covers towing is Chapter 2308 of the Occupations Code. There are also TDLR Rules 85 and 86 that are enforced by TDLR.

This does not mean those are the only laws or rules that govern the towing industry, TXDOT and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration also have regulations concerning motor vehicles. In this chapter, we will cover the regulations that affect tow operators.

### **Tow operators licensing.....**

ALL tow operators in the state of Texas are required to be licensed. There are three categories of licenses.

- Consent tow (CT)
- Private property tow (PP)
- Incident management tow (IM)

**Consent tow** - Any tow of a motor vehicle in which the tow truck is summoned by the owner or operator of the vehicle or by a person who has possession, custody, or control of the vehicle. The term does not include an incident management tow or a private property tow. If you have a CT license you can only tow consent tows. Repossessions are a consent tow.

**Private property** - Any tow of a vehicle authorized by a parking facility owner without the consent of the owner or operator of the vehicle. If you have a PP license you can only tow private property and consent tows.

**Incident management** - Any tow of a vehicle in which the tow truck is summoned to the scene of a traffic accident or to an incident, including the removal of a vehicle, commercial cargo, and commercial debris from an accident or incident scene. An incident management towing permit is required for a tow truck used to perform any nonconsent tow initiated by a peace officer, including a tow allowed under §545.3051, Transportation Code. If you have an IM license you can tow Incident management, private property, or consent tows.

IM & PP tows are nonconsent type tows.

### **Requirements for licensing are.....**

- valid state-issued driver's license
- Criminal background check
- Submit an application to TDLR
- Pay a \$100.00 annual license fee
- Have passed a certification test approved by TDLR (the exception is a consent tower's license).

### **Incident Management license**

An applicant for an "Incident Management license" must.....

- submit an application on TDLR form
- be a licensed Texas driver
- Have passed a certification test approved by TDLR
- successfully pass a criminal background check
- Pay the required fee

### **Private Property license**

An applicant for a "Private property tow license" must.....

- submit an application on TDLR form
- be a licensed Texas driver
- Have passed a certification test approved by TDLR
- successfully pass a criminal background check
- Pay the required fee

### **Consent tow license**

An applicant for a "Consent tow license" must.....

- submit an application on TDLR form
- be a licensed Texas driver
- successfully pass a criminal background check
- pay the required fee

**All licenses must be renewed on an annual basis.**

### ***Additional requirements for tow operators include...***

- **Annual CE training.** Each license holder must complete an approved continuing education program before the license holder may **renew** their license.
- **Incident management license operators** must complete a professional development course relating to towing that is approved by TDLR that consists of 8 hours of classroom and hands-on training for their first-year renewal then 4 hours for each year thereafter to renew their license.
- **Consent tow and private property tow license operators** must complete 4 hours of continuing education each year to renew their license.
- **Drug tests.** Drug testing of all tow license holders is required each year. Additionally, license holders are required to submit to "Random" testing as prescribed by TDLR and their company's policy.
- **Safety clothing.** License holders must wear at all times when using or assisting tow operations on a road or road-related area.....a uniform, a reflective vest that meets ANSI/ISEA for high visibility apparel and must carry and openly display the appropriate TDLR-issued license.

### **Tow trucks licensed by TDLR must meet the following requirements.....**

- TDLR numbers with appropriate designations (CT, PP, IM) must be displayed on the vehicle.
- TDLR cab cards must be in the vehicle.

### **According to TDLR Rules 86.1000**

- (a) Each tow truck shall, if applicable:
  - (1) have a legible manufacturer's data plate indicating the capacity of the boom, the winch, or the carry mechanism; or
  - (2) have a document in the truck from the manufacturer stating the capacity of the boom, the winch, and the carry mechanism.
- (b) Every hydraulic line on each tow truck must be free of leaks and be in a good working condition free of defects.
- (c) The winch must not exceed the capacity of the boom or leak oil.
- (d) The cables must be as specified by the manufacturer and be in good condition, within manufacturer guidelines.

Vehicle Storage Facility Statutes and Rules go hand in hand with Towing laws. Due to the nature of the business, there are laws referencing Towing in the VSF Occupations Code 2303 and VSF requirement in Towing Occupations Code 2308. Even if you are not running a VSF facility and are towing vehicles to another VSF you need to be aware of the laws and rules that govern VSF. They could have an impact on your customers.

VSF employees must be licensed through TDLR. When a tow operator gives a tow ticket to a VSF that tow ticket must be complete so that proper notice to the owners is sent out correctly. Also, proper payment may be received when they retrieve the vehicle and then the towing company gets paid. All VSFs must take cash, debit cards, & credit cards.

### **TDLR has rules that govern tow companies and tow operator conduct.**

#### **86.715. Responsibilities of Towing Operators--Standards of Conduct.**

- (a) A towing operator may not charge a fee for a nonconsent tow that is greater than the statewide fee or non-consent tow fee approved 2308.2065.
- (b) A towing operator may not charge a fee related to a nonconsent tow unless that fee is authorized by the statewide fee or nonconsent tow fees approved by 2308.2065.
- (c) A towing operator must allow department personnel and law enforcement to inspect a tow truck permitted under this chapter.
- (d) A towing operator must perform each tow in a safe and competent manner based on the circumstances and type of vehicle under tow.
- (e) During the term of the towing operator license, a towing operator must maintain a current valid driver's license. An occupational driver's license does not meet the requirements of this chapter.

- (f) A towing operator may not tow a vehicle to a vehicle storage facility unless the vehicle storage facility displays a TDLR license number.
- (g) A towing operator may not remove and store an unauthorized vehicle unless authorized by Texas Occupations Code, §2308.255.
- (h) A towing operator may not perform a non-consent tow unless the property from which the vehicle is towed is in compliance with Texas Occupations Code, §§2308.301-2308.305.
- (i) Except as authorized by Texas Occupations Code, §§2308.351-2308.354, a towing operator may not perform a nonconsent tow from:
  - (1) a leased right-of-way.
  - (2) an area between a parking facility and a public right-of-way.
  - (3) a public right-of-way; or
  - (4) a public roadway.
- (j) A towing operator must prepare and issue a tow ticket for each nonconsent tow.
- (k) A towing operator must provide a copy of the tow ticket to the vehicle owner, if the owner or operator is present and available at the time of the tow, and a copy delivered to the vehicle storage facility, or place agreed upon by the towing operator and vehicle owner.
- (l) The tow ticket provided by the towing operator shall only authorize charges directly related to towing the vehicle to a designated location authorized by subsection(k).
- (m) The tow ticket provided by the towing operator must itemize each charge and must characterize the fees using the identical fee structure stated in the towing company's nonconsent towing fee schedule on file with the VSF.
- (n) The towing operator must include on the tow ticket the licensed name of the towing company, publicly listed telephone number, towing company TDLR license number, and the TDLR license number of the towing operator.
- (o) A towing operator must perform each towing operation with honesty, trustworthiness, and integrity.
- (p) When performing towing operations, all towing operators must carry and openly display the appropriate TDLR issued original towing operator license.

**Even though a tow ticket is issued, it does not need to be signed by the customer.**

# Traffic Incident Management

Traffic incidents have a great effect on the safety of responders and on the mobility of the traveling public using our roadways. They can contribute to operator deaths and injuries, equipment damage, motorist injuries through secondary crashes, and the cost and time of traffic delay in urban and rural areas. Traffic Incident Management (TIM) is emerging as a proven solution to address these safety and mobility concerns.

Traffic incident management is a planned and coordinated process to detect, respond to, and remove traffic incidents and restore traffic capacity as safely and quickly as possible. It involves the coordinated interactions of police, fire, EMS, public works, traffic services, and private towing companies.

## **What is a traffic incident?.....**

A traffic incident is an emergency road user occurrence, a natural disaster, or other planned event that affects or impedes the normal flow of traffic.

## **TXDOT defines traffic incidents as.....**

(defined in Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) Book)

- **Minor incidents**...lasting 60 minutes or less, responders are typically law enforcement and towers.
- **Intermediate incidents**...lasting 60 minutes to 4 hours, usually involve lane closures, possibly complete road closure, and traffic control devices, responders usually include law enforcement, fire units, EMS, and possibly hazmat.
- **Major incidents**...Lasting more than 4 hours, usually fatalities involved, hazmat, numerous vehicles, and other natural or manmade disasters. Lane and/or road closures are required, and warnings to the public such as signage, light boards, radio and TV announcements, and traffic control devices are put into play.

## **What is traffic incident management?.....**

It is the process of coordinating the resources of police, fire, EMS, public works/traffic services, and private towing companies to detect, respond to, and clear traffic incidents as quickly as possible while:

- Providing all-over scene safety for all responders
- Protecting the traveling public

Actions by responders when they reach the scene, both in regard to the incident itself and to traffic affected by the incident, have a tremendous bearing on the safe and successful resolution of the incident. Perhaps the single most important aspect of incident management is the recognition that traffic and its smooth and safe movement are critical.

**The primary goal is to minimize traffic disruption while maintaining a safe workplace for responders.**

## **What are the benefits of a traffic incident management program?.....**

- Increased survival rates of crash victims
- Reduced delays
- Improved response times
- Improved air quality
- Reduced occurrence of secondary crash incidents
- Improved safety of responders, crash victims, and other motorists

## **The problem.....**

Tow operators that respond to crashes work in an extremely hazardous environment. Traffic incidents impact the safety of all responders including the tow operator.

All too often responders fall victim to secondary crashes that occur as they work the original incident.

## **The solution.....**

Quick clearance is one of the major elements in the solution. The establishment of a safe work scene is just as important. The following are some keys to successful incident management.....

- Reduce time to detect incidents
- Initiate expedient and appropriate response
- Clearing the incident quickly
- Protect both on-scene responders and the public
- Reduce delays in traffic
- Reduce the possibility of secondary crashes

## **Incident Command.....**

In most traffic incidents an incident commander, most likely a law enforcement officer or a fire and rescue chief, coordinates the on-scene activities. For most incidents, the command structure is simple and is largely implied through the duties of those that are on the scene. In larger incidents, especially those involving many agencies with overlapping jurisdictions, command, and control may become complicated.

A tow operator's first duty involves determining the CORRECT TYPE AND NUMBER OF TOW TRUCKS REQUIRED TO REMOVE IMMOBILIZED VEHICLES.

## **Managing the Roadway Space.....**

In order for traffic to move smoothly and safely past the incident, roadway space must be managed, with the following goals:

- Separate scene operations from moving traffic. If roadways or lanes will be closed, traffic needs to be channelized to merge into lanes or shoulders that will remain open to traffic. Cones or flares can be used as channelization devices to establish lane closure tapers.

- Take only as many lanes as you need for only if you need them. Lane-blocking incidents affect traffic flow far out of proportion to the number of lanes blocked. An incident blocking one lane of a three-lane roadway reduces capacity by 50%. Blocking two lanes reduces traffic flow by 80%.

**USDOT ESTIMATES THAT APPROXIMATELY 18% OF TRAFFIC DEATHS ON FREEWAYS ARE THE RESULT OF SECONDARY CRASHES.**

### **Shielding Responders from Traffic.....**

Positioning emergency units for shielding responders is critical. As a rule, a fire unit will be placed at the beginning of the scene, and police cruisers may also be placed at the beginning to assist in traffic management.

EMS units should be placed as close to the crash as possible for quick access to victims. Tow trucks should stage toward the rear of the scene being careful NOT TO BLOCK EMS units from entering or exiting the scene. All responders are REQUIRED to wear at least ANSI reflective vests or garments. Rule 86.1001 in the Texas Administrative Code states:

(b) towing operators must wear a reflective vest, shirt, or reflective jacket at all times while working outside the tow truck; the reflective vest, shirt, or reflective jacket must meet the ANSI/ISEA requirements for high visibility safety apparel at all times when using or assisting in the use or operation of a licensed tow truck on a road or road related area.

### **Emergency Lights.....**

Although emergency lighting is essential in the first stages of incident management, as the scene comes under control use of such lighting should be minimized to what is needed to maintain ample warning to approaching traffic. Studies have indicated that a mass of flashing, rotating, strobes, etc. tends to confuse on-coming traffic.

### **Traffic Incident Management signs.....**

Texas Department of Transportation has specific regulations for signs, cones, scene securement, etc. The regulations are listed in detail in the MUTCD regulations. The professional tow operator should review and be familiar with these regulations.

### **What does all this mean to me, the tow operator?**

The purpose of this section is to remind the professional tow operator that working accidents puts him/her a great risk. Being familiar with new approaches to incident management controls will help keep you safe. Also, it is the tow operator's responsibility to assume membership in the incident management team. You are a vital part of that team. When it gets down to it, the scene is never done until the tow operator does his job!!!!



## Tow Trucks & Equipment

There will be times when a tow operator is required to use more than one type of tow truck. This section is designed to familiarize you with the variety of trucks in use in our industry. There are basically three categories of tow trucks with specialized designs in each category. These are.....

- **Light Duty** consists of "Boom Trucks", "Tilt Beds", "Snatch Trucks", and variations of each.
- **Medium Duty**, primarily "Boom Trucks" but there are medium duty "Tilt Beds" in operation also.
- **Heavy Duty**, consists of "tandem axle" "Boom Trucks", "Rotating Boom Trucks", and "XP" side pulls that demonstrate new technology in recovery.

Light duty Tow Trucks will be covered in detail. Light-duty tow trucks are designed to tow or recover passenger cars, pickups, and small vans.

## TRAA VEHICLE IDENTIFICATION GUIDE®

**CLASS 1 • LIGHT-DUTY** • (6,000 lbs. or less GVW - 4 tires)\*



**CLASS 2 • LIGHT-DUTY** • (6,001 - 10,000 lbs. GVW - 4 tires)\*



Classes 1 and 2 include passenger vehicles, light trucks, minivans, full size pickups, sport utility vehicles and full size vans.

**CLASS 3 • MEDIUM-DUTY** • (10,001 - 14,000 lbs. GVW - 6 tires or more)\*



**CLASS 4 • MEDIUM-DUTY** • (14,001 - 16,000 lbs. GVW - 6 tires or more)\*



**CLASS 5 • MEDIUM-DUTY** • (16,001 - 19,500 lbs. GVW - 6 tires or more)\*



**CLASS 6 • MEDIUM-DUTY** • (19,501 - 26,000 lbs. GVW - 6 tires or more)\*



Classes 3 through 6 include a wide range of mid-size vehicles, delivery trucks, utility vehicles, motorhomes, parcel trucks, ambulances, small dump trucks, landscape trucks, flatbed and stake trucks, refrigerated and box trucks, small and medium school and transit buses.

**CLASS 7 • HEAVY-DUTY** • (26,001 - 33,000 lbs. GVW - 6 tires or more)\*



**CLASS 8 • HEAVY-DUTY** • (33,001 lbs. and over GVW - 10 tires or more)\*



Classes 7 and 8 include a wide range of heavy vehicles, large delivery trucks, motor coaches, refuse trucks, cement mixers, all tractor trailer combinations including double trailers.

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### Information Needed To Correctly Dispatch Towing and Recovery Units:

- Year, Make and Model of Vehicle to be Towed or Recovered
- DOT Classification (Class 1 – 8 based on GVW)
- Location of Vehicle
- Type of Tow (impound, accident, recovery motorist assist, etc.)
- Additional Vehicle Information
  - 2 wheel drive, 4 wheel drive, all wheel drive
  - damage to vehicle, fire condition
  - vehicle loaded or empty
  - cargo contents
  - does the vehicle have a trailer
  - are the keys with the vehicle

**Note:** Any vehicle may carry hazardous materials. Advise if placarded.

**\* Note:** The Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR) of the vehicle to be towed or recovered can be found on the identification label on the vehicle's driver's side doorframe. The number of pounds listed on the label can then be compared with the DOT Classification Vehicle Type Chart for the correct DOT class.

Illustrations: © TTI Publications/Vehicle Identification Guide, © TMA

Law enforcement communications with towing and recovery operators describing an incident and the vehicles involved can insure quick and efficient clearing of these scenes and less disruption to traffic flow. In an effort to standardize communications, the towing industry is adopting the federal vehicle class standards as outlined herein.

### VIN CODES

The year of the vehicle is critical information for towing operators in order for them to reference correct towing procedures. The diagrams on the front are examples of classifications. The following information about vehicle identification numbers affixed to the chassis will help determine the vehicle's year. As noted, the vehicle's year, identified by a letter or number in the VIN sequence, is the eighth character from the right.

1P8ZA1279SZ215470

EXAMPLE 1995 VIN NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_ ↑

1980.....A	1987.....H	1994.....R	2001.....1	2008.....8
1981.....B	1988.....J	1995.....S	2002.....2	2009.....9
1982.....C	1989.....K	1996.....T	2003.....3	2010.....A
1983.....D	1990.....L	1997.....V	2004.....4	2011.....B
1984.....E	1991.....M	1998.....W	2005.....5	2012.....C
1985.....F	1992.....N	1999.....X	2006.....6	
1986.....G	1993.....P	2000.....Y	2007.....7	

### TOW TRUCK/CAR CARRIER CLASSIFICATION

#### LIGHT-DUTY

TOW TRUCK



CAR CARRIER



#### HEAVY-DUTY



#### MEDIUM-DUTY

TOW TRUCK



CAR CARRIER



#### LOW BOY TRAILER



Illustrations: © TTI Publications and Vehicle Identification Guide, © TMA

## Tow Truck Classification

Tow Trucks are classified by *GVWR, TOW EQUIPMENT RATING, AND TOWING CAPACITY*. **To be safe**, the professional tow operator will understand all the ratings for the truck he/she operates.

Light-duty tow trucks are designed to transport or recover passenger cars, pick-up trucks, and light vans. **Tow equipment ratings vary by manufacturer and may be different from one truck to another.** As a rule, light-duty tow trucks have a GVWR of up to 26,000 pounds, a wheel-lift "lifting" capacity of up to 4000 pounds, and/or a total payload of up to 10,000 pounds.

### Introduction to Ratings

**Truck chassis ratings:** GVWR (gross vehicle weight rating)  
GAWR (gross axle weight rating)  
GCWR (gross combination weight rating)

**Towing device ratings:** Wheel Lift  
Tow sling  
Under lift

**Equipment ratings:** Boom  
Winch  
Wire rope

**Auxiliary equipment ratings:** Chains  
Snatch blocks  
Wheel/ recovery straps

Ratings/capacities are important because they provide the necessary information to help tow operators make safe decisions regarding limits on equipment usage that could cause injury to the operator or others.

**Chassis, boom, bed, winch, and wheel lift ratings.....**The manufacturer installs a plate on the equipment that designates a safe working load on the equipment. The lift capacity may decrease as the lift or boom is extended. Chain, wire rope, hook, and strap ratings will be covered in another section of this guide.

### Basic Controls.....

With the exception of the "PTO" (power take-off) and winch engagement lever, the controls for the boom, wheel lift, tilt bed, and winch are located at the rear of the wrecker body, with operating controls on both sides of the truck. The placement of

controls on the right side of the truck is a major safety feature of any tow truck. The “offside” controls allow a tow operator a large margin of safety when working beside the roadway. The placement of these controls places the truck between the operator and traffic. Every tow operator should use these instead of the driver-side controls when there is danger from traffic.

- **Boom truck** controls usually consist of a lever for raising and lowering the boom and one for extending and retracting.
- **Wheel lift controls** usually consist of three levers; up and down, in and out, and tilt up and down.
- **Tilt Bed controls** usually consist of two levers, forward and back, and tilt up and down.

**For safe working load capacity/rating of booms, wheel lifts, and tilt beds, consult the manufacturer’s label affixed to each of these units.**

Injury or worse can occur if the safe working capacity of these units is exceeded.

#### **Daily inspection of wheel lift....**

Look for bent or worn parts, look for cracks around welds, check for proper lubrication, and look for hydraulic leaks. Be on the lookout for wear and distortion around the pivot pin. Check controls for smooth operation and adjustment. Check “L arms” for distortion, cracks, and bent areas. Check wheel straps for cuts, fraying, and damage. Make sure ratchets are in good working order.

When driving with a vehicle in tow, more caution is required. More stopping distance, more lane change space, more passing space, and more turning space are necessary. Slow down when crossing low places, humps, and dips. Always use tow lights and safety chains.

**The safe working capacity of most light-duty wheel lifts is 4000 lbs.**



**Booms.....**

Most boom trucks in use today are powered by hydraulics. For the system to work, fluid is transmitted from the “PTO” attached to the transmission of the truck. This hydraulic fluid is routed to the boom, winch, and wheel lift. Although the boom may have a specific safe working load assigned by the manufacturer, other factors come into play. These include the safe working load of the winch, wire rope, and tow sling.

Light-duty boom trucks may be equipped with either one or two winches that route one or two cables over the sheaves on the head of the boom. The truck may or may not have a tow sling attachment. If equipped with a tow sling, one of the cables can be attached to the sling.

Boom and winch controls are located on both sides of the rear deck of the truck. Use of the right-side controls should be encouraged to provide a safe working area for the operator.

#### **Daily boom inspection.....**

Check hydraulic fluid levels, check controls for ease of movement, and inspect wire rope, sheaves on the boom, and hooks for damage, cracks, etc.

Make sure the tow sling is secured. Look for leaks around the hydraulic cylinders of the boom.

#### **Be aware of the boom capacity rating.**

#### **Tilt beds.....**

Like wheel lifts and booms, the tilt bed gets its power from hydraulics. Bed controls are usually combined in an enclosure with wheel lift controls, on both sides of the bed. The proper procedure for extending and lowering the bed is as follows.... Extend the bed to the rear far enough to clear the bed locks, usually about a foot. Next, tilt the bed until the stabilizer contacts the ground. At this point, extend the bed until the rear of the bed firmly contacts the ground. The rear of the bed should be approximately ten feet from the towed vehicle. Once the vehicle is safely placed on the bed, move the bed forward (before tilting down) until the weight is over the rear axle. At this point, tilt the bed down to contact the frame rails and move the bed forward to fully contact the bed locks. **Use proper tie-down procedures to secure the towed vehicle before tilting the bed completely down.**

#### **Daily inspection of the tilt bed.....**

Always check bed locks for broken bolts, bent locks, and lubrication. Check hydraulic fluid level. Inspect attachment pins on hydraulic pistons and attachment points to the frame of the truck. Inspect winch attachment bolts. If the light bar is attached to the bed, make sure all lighting is working properly.

**Beds range from 17 feet to 21 feet in length and are usually rated at 10,000-pound safe work capacity.**

## **Chains**

The National Association of Chain Manufacturers has adopted a system for identifying chains. Chains that are manufactured by these standards bear a letter and a number. The letter identifies the manufacturer, the number represents the chain's grade or strength rating. A professional tow operator will never use a chain that cannot be identified.

The most common chains and the grades that are suitable for the towing industry are.....

- Grade 70, transport chain
- Grade 80, alloy chain

These grades of chains are identified by permanent stamps on the side of the links. The most common size of chain in light-duty work is 3/8 inch as measured on one side of the link.

The safe working capacities of the 3/8-inch grade 70 and grade 80 are approximately.....

- grade 70.....6,600 pounds
- grade 80.....7,300 pounds

**Be sure to check the manufacturer's guidelines for the chains you are using.**

Chain grades such as "proof coil" and "high test" are substantially weaker and are not suitable for the towing industry. Only grade 80 or higher alloy chain is approved by "OSHA" for overhead lifting.

## **Daily inspection of chains**

As part of the professional tow operator's daily inspection, chains should be examined for kinks, twists, knots, cracked or broken links, stretching, bending, and other abnormalities.

**Being aware of the safe working load and condition of chains can help avoid serious injury to the tow operator.**

## **Wire Rope**

The most common sizes of wire rope used for light-duty towing are approximately.....

- 3/8-inch 6x19, safe working capacity.....3500 pounds
- 7/16-inch 6x19, safe working capacity.....4700 pounds

Note: that safe working capacity and breaking strength are completely different. You do not want to overload your wire rope or your winch ability.

Also wire rope capacity can vary from different manufacturers. **Be sure to check the manufacturer's guidelines for the wire rope you are using.**

The definition of "6x19" is.....6 strands and 19 wires per strand. The core is usually fiber, although a steel core is available.

Wire ropes and winches go hand in hand. One is no good without the other. Care should be taken when spooling wire rope onto the winch. The wraps should be tight against each other, with no gaps or overlapping. The hook at the working end of the wire rope should be attached to the cable using a swaged connector. Cable clamps should never be used on wire rope.

Wire rope lengths on tilt beds are normally 50 feet in length, while wire rope on a boom truck can be from 100 feet to 150 feet, depending on winch capacity.

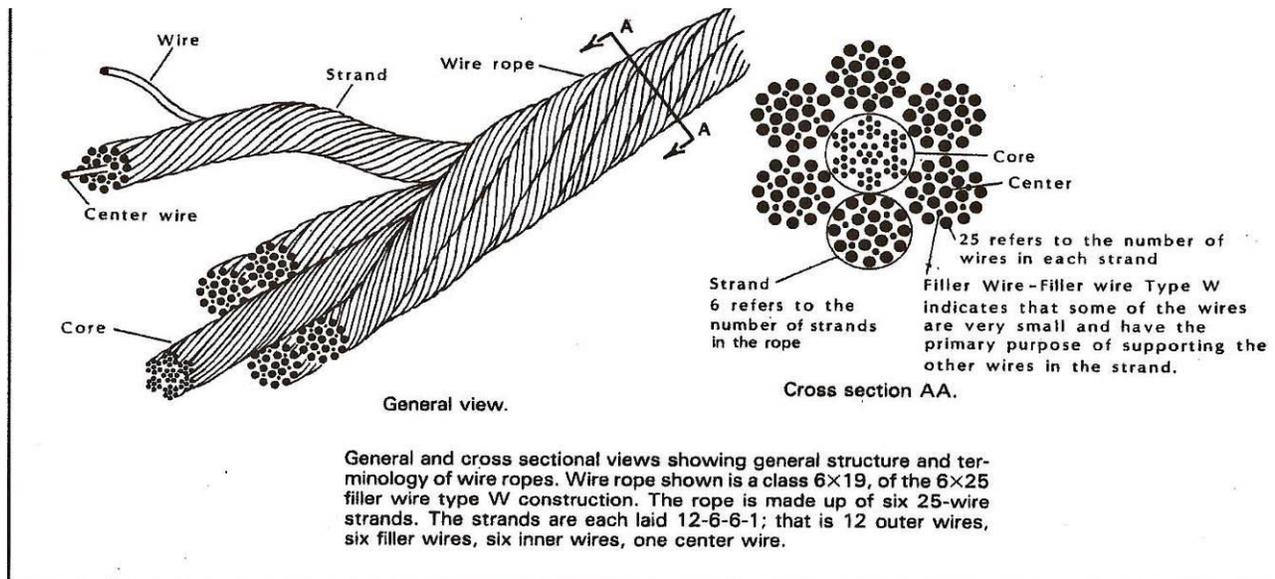


Figure D-1.—General terminology, structure, and cross-sectional views of wire rope.

### Daily wire rope inspection.....

The professional tow operator will observe wire rope conditions many times during his/her shift. The tow operator will be on the lookout for broken wires, broken strands, distortion around the hook area, flat spots on the cable, damaged thimbles, kinks, and drums not wrapped properly. Make sure the wire rope is properly lubricated. Failure to identify hazards may result in serious injury to the operator and bystanders.

**The use of gloves is required when working with wire rope.**

## Winches

Winches on tow trucks today are powered two ways; electric and hydraulic. However, hydraulic-powered winches make up the vast majority of trucks. Like the boom, wheel lift, and bed, hydraulic fluid is pumped from the “PTO” to the winch. The biggest advantage that a hydraulic winch has over electricity is the ability to “feather” the controls to adjust speed.

Most light-duty winches have a safe working capacity of 8,000 pounds with some rated at 10,000 pounds for use in light-duty tow trucks. A factor in the capacity of any winch is the number of layers on the drum. With one layer the winch can work at its rated capacity. Each additional layer decreases the capacity by 25%. The professional tow operator will keep this in mind when working with heavy pulls. Be aware that when attempting loads that are close to the rated capacity, the winch may slip or bog down. This is a sure sign that you need to reconfigure your tow.

The basic controls for winches are .....power control (PTO) and engagement lever. Proper fluid level and maintenance are critical to the safe operation of the winch.



Proper wrap on winch

### Daily winch inspection.....

Check the fluid level, check the cable for tangles, check the bolts that secure the winch to the truck, and inspect the engagement lever for smooth operation.

### Snatch Blocks

Snatch blocks are an extremely valuable tool for a tow operator. They enable the operator to accomplish several goals. The use of snatch blocks allows the operator to change the direction of the pull, change the angle of the pull, and by proper positioning, can increase the capacity of the wire rope. Every tow truck should be equipped with at least one snatch block.

Most snatch blocks have a rating plate showing the safe capacity weight rating. This capacity should never be exceeded. Snatch blocks contain a sheave. This is the grooved

wheel within a block that the rope fits into. The diameter of the sheave must match the diameter of the wire rope fed through it. By using a wire rope that does not match the sheave, kinking, and distortion of the wire rope will occur creating an unsafe condition.



### **Daily inspection of snatch blocks....**

As the professional tow operator inspects his/her truck and equipment, attention must be paid to observing the condition of the snatch block. Things to look for include.....

- Twisting or bent snatch block body
- Free rotation of sheave
- Nicks and gouges in the groove of the sheave
- Bent or damaged hook
- Safety clasp or bolt in good condition

### **Straps & Endless Loops**

In the last few years, straps and endless loops have become common tools on tow trucks. Like snatch blocks, they have many uses. One important use for the light duty tow operator is their use can aid in the prevention of damage to the towed vehicle. For example, using a strap or loop to secure the vehicle can reduce the possibility of damaging the undercarriage of vehicles that do not have a strong tie-down point. Placing the strap or loop through the wheel and attaching it to tie-down chains prevent needless damage.

Ratchet straps are in common use on wheel lifts and dollies but can also be used when securing a vehicle on a tilt bed for the front tie downs, allowing the winch cable to be loosened.

Instead of chains for towing bridles (V chains), the use of bridle straps should be used on fragile vehicles.

Endless loops also have many uses. They can in some instances replace chains and wire rope. They can be used in vertical lifts, chokers, and baskets.

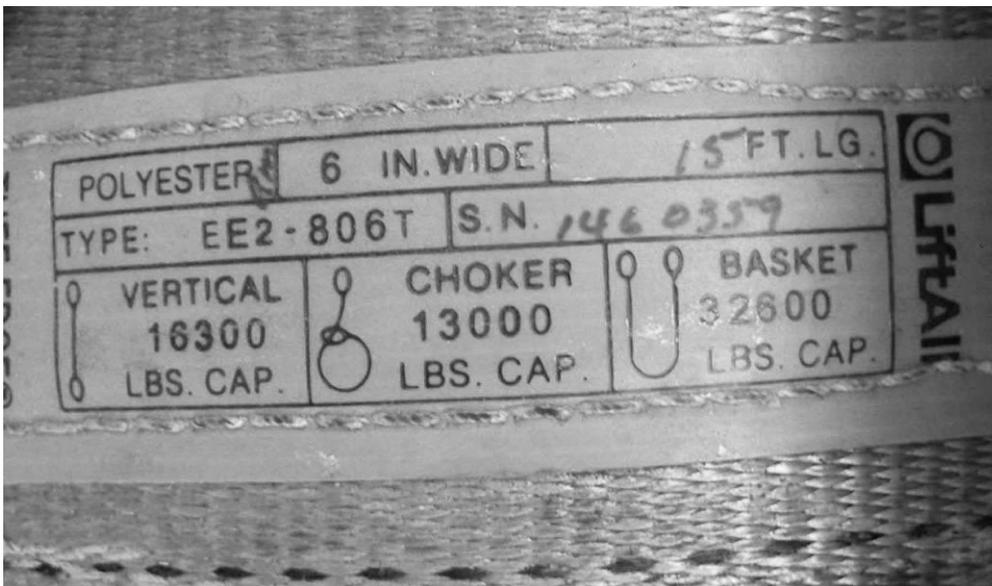


Straps and loops have safe working capacities that include a tag attached that will indicate the capacities for vertical lifts, chokers, and basket rigging. Always refer to these capacities when using straps and loops.

Also, the color of the strap or loop is an indicator of safe capacity.....

- Purple.....2,600 pounds
- Green.....5,300 pounds
- Yellow.....8,400 pounds
- Red.....13,000 pounds
- Blue.....21,000 pounds

**Never exceed these capacities. Over-capacity use can lead to a shortened life or the breaking of a strap or loop.**



### **Daily inspection of straps and loops.....**

Things to be alert for when checking straps and loops are fraying, cuts, tears, chaffing, stitching separation, and unraveling. If any of these conditions are present, **Replace them!!!!!!**

### **Light Duty Towing & Recovery**

In this chapter, we will cover the following topics.....

- Non-consent private property tows
- Road service and consent towing
- Recovery

**Non-Consent towing** usually consists of removing vehicles without the knowledge of the owner. Incident management towing includes the removal of vehicles from accident scenes or arrests with authorization from law enforcement.

Private property non-consent towing in Texas falls under the authority of TDLR as explained in the TDLR section of this study guide. The tow operator **MUST** be knowledgeable of these regulations. For example, no vehicle can be removed from private property without written authorization from the property owner or manager. Just because the tow operator has written authorization, this does not remove the tow operator from liability for damages incurred by the tow. Proper hook-up procedures and safety practices are required.

### **Road service.....**

The tow operators involved in providing road service should be aware of proper safety procedures. Some of these procedures include safe positioning of the tow truck when arriving at the customer's vehicle when in traffic exchanging information with the customer off the roadway, knowledge of safe jumper cable hook-up when jump-starting a vehicle, knowledge of safe procedures when changing a tire, knowledge of hook up and tow procedures when providing a tow, and knowledge of a great number of vehicles and their hook points and mechanical makeup.

If the road service call is for providing a tow for a disabled vehicle, position the tow truck in front of the vehicle to be towed. If the call is for other services, position the tow truck behind the customer's vehicle and use it to provide protection from approaching traffic.

When providing a **jump start**, connect cables to the disabled vehicle first with the ignition in the off position. Then connect the other end to the tow truck connecting the **POSITIVE** terminal first. Then connect to the **NEGATIVE** terminal. **Always wear safety glasses and gloves when providing a jump start** because batteries contain acid and a fire or explosion is always a threat.

**Delivery of fuel** to a disabled vehicle presents many hazards. The potential for fire is always present. NEVER smoke when fueling a vehicle. Be alert to spills and fumes as these pose a threat to you and the customer. Also, keep a constant watch on approaching traffic.

When on a call to **change a tire**, if possible, move the disabled vehicle off the roadway far enough to provide a safety cushion between you and traffic. Make sure that you know the proper lifting points before jacking up the vehicle. Always have the appropriate tools for removing and replacing tires and wheel covers.

**Lockout services** must be handled with extreme caution. Many of today's modern vehicles are equipped with "keyless entry" devices, alarm systems, and other electronic devices that can be damaged or ruined by careless practices. Always work on the off-traffic side of the vehicle. The use of proper lockout tools is mandatory. Coat hangers and wires are to be avoided.

**When providing road services, be alert to any hazard that may jeopardize your customers and your safety.** Having your customers sit inside your truck is not just customer service but will put them out of harm's way and allows you less distraction while doing your job properly.

### **Recovery**

Recovery operations can consist of many things. When a professional tow operator is dispatched to an accident scene, he/she will need to know many things, such as the proper location, number of vehicles involved, what street or road to use to gain access to the scene, any special circumstances, etc. Hopefully, law enforcement will provide much of this information. The professional tow operator should have a thorough knowledge of streets, highways, and traffic patterns that will allow him/her to get to the scene as quickly and safely as possible.

The professional tow operator will have inspected his truck and equipment at the beginning of his shift to make certain that all equipment is functioning and available when needed. Nothing can be worse than to arrive at an accident scene with the wrong equipment or none at all. **It is the tow operator's responsibility to inspect these things every day.**

When arriving at the accident scene, the first priority is to find the proper place to stage the tow truck. Be alert to approaching traffic, determine where other emergency vehicles are staged, provide additional scene protection if needed, and above all check in with the officer in charge at the scene.

Begin your survey of the damaged vehicle and determine the safest approach to clearance of the vehicles or vehicles involved. **Make sure that you are wearing your reflective vest.**

Every successful recovery depends on three key elements.....

- Communication
- Cooperation
- Clearance

When given the word to proceed, the professional tow operator will position the truck safely and quickly hook up the damaged vehicle/vehicles. At this point, knowledge of proper hook points on any vehicle is extremely important. Improperly attached chains and wire ropes can be a danger to the tow operator and bystanders. Do not shortcut the hook-up process. Always keep in mind that “quick clearance” is a priority, **but so is safety.**

There are many scenarios that a tow operator will experience. Rollovers, front-end collisions, collisions with fixed objects, water recoveries, and many more. Today’s professional tow operators must be mentally prepared as well as having proper equipment and training for any situation. The following are necessary steps for successful recoveries.

The first step in recovery is to:

- Survey the scene

Then:

- Choose a recovery path
- Choose a position for the tow truck
- Estimate the amount of pull
- Stabilize the tow truck
- Rig for recovery
- Recover the vehicle
- Remove debris

When working at the scene be sure to face the traffic and work on the non-traffic side of the vehicle as much as possible.

Removal of debris is an important part of the recovery process. Not cleaning up the scene can create a danger to other motorists and cause another accident. Have proper equipment for clean up. Some suggestions are.....

- Broom
- 5-gallon bucket
- Shovel

- Container of oil-absorbent material
- Remember to secure debris on the truck.

Sometime during the recovery process, the professional tow operator will **obtain the name, address, and phone number** of the owner or driver of the damaged vehicle. This is extremely important information whether the vehicle is transported to the vehicle storage facility (VSF) or to a repair facility.

After the recovery, walk around the tow truck, and pay close attention to the proper securement of the damaged vehicle. Notify your dispatcher when departing and provide the necessary information.

Before leaving the scene, check with the officer in charge to make sure that no additional information or services are needed. Nothing is more embarrassing than to be called back to the scene to complete the job.

## **Private Property/Non-Consent**

Non-consent tows consist of Incident Management and Private Property tows. Unlike when a motorist gets in an accident, most know their vehicle will have to be towed but who tows it may be at the discretion of law enforcement, private property towing is done without the knowledge or consent of an owner. To protect the consumer Occupations Code 2308 spells out the rights and limitations of Private Property towing. You cannot do a non-consent tow with a CT license or CT-licensed tow truck.

In most circumstances, PP towing will occur when a driver has parked a vehicle in a space where parking is prohibited. If this is a public space with parking just for customers, it will need to have signposted according to Texas state statute. No matter what the circumstance for the tow a towing company must have written authorization from the property manager to tow the vehicle.

Owners may come out while a tow operator is starting to load a vehicle on their truck. If the vehicle has not been loaded and secured the tow operator will need to release the car for No Charge. However, if a vehicle is hooked up and is ready to tow out of the space a drop fee may be charged at that time. Drop fees must not exceed 50% of the regulated private property tow fee.

Tow fees including drop fees may differ in different jurisdictions and municipal contracts. Be sure you are charging the correct amount.

TDLR sets maximum charges that can be assessed for a Private Property Tow as per Admin Rule 86.455.

These maximum charges as of 11-01-2021 are:

- Light Duty tows of a vehicle with a GVWR of 10,000 or less **\$272**.
- Medium Duty tows of vehicles with a GVWR 10,000 - 25,000lbs. is **\$380**
- Heavy Duty tows of vehicles with a GVWR of \$25,000 or more is **\$489** per unit or a maximum of \$978

When doing a Private Property tow, you should follow all safety procedures as you would with any other tow before you pull out of the parking facility.

- The vehicle should be secure with a 4-point tiedown.
- The steering wheel should be secured.
- Install proper tow lighting.

After a Private Property tow has happened and the vehicle has been taken to a Vehicle Storage Facility. The VSF is required by Texas statute to report to law enforcement information on the vehicle within 2 hours of receiving the vehicle. However, different law enforcement jurisdictions or municipality contracts may require reporting in less time, so be sure you know your county and city regulations.

With few exceptions listed in Occupations Code 2308, a vehicle may not be towed from a parking facility without the parking facility having the correct signage placed where it is conspicuously visible to a driver. This signage must have been in place and permanently mounted on a pole post, permanent wall, or barrier for at least 24 hours prior to the vehicle being towed and remain installed at the time of towing.

The unobstructed sign must be a minimum of 18x25 and must be placed no farther than 25 feet from the entrance to a parking facility and installed so that the bottom edge is no lower than 5 feet and no higher than 8 feet from the ground.

**TDLR has rules against financial gain for a parking facility owner.** A towing company cannot give a parking facility any monetary benefits.

Sec. 2308.401. Parking Facility Owner Prohibited from Receiving Financial Gain from Towing Company or Booting Company.

- (a) A parking facility owner may not directly or indirectly accept anything of value from:
- (1) a towing company in connection with the removal of a vehicle from a parking facility; or
  - (2) a booting company in connection with booting a vehicle in a parking facility.
- (b) A parking facility owner may not have a direct or indirect monetary interest in:
- (1) a towing company that for compensation removes unauthorized vehicles from a parking facility in which the parking facility owner has an interest; or
  - (2) a booting company that for compensation boots vehicles in a parking facility in which the parking facility owner has an interest.

(c) This section does not apply to a sign required under Section 2308.301 provided by towing or booting company to a parking facility owner.

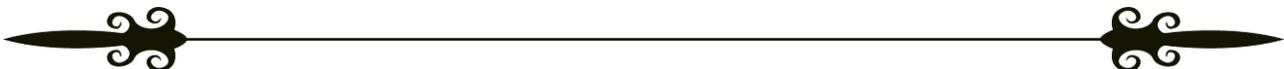
The TDLR private property statute not only is there to help protect the owners of vehicles but also to help tow companies know that property owners are abiding by the law for tows that they ask a company to make. Under 2308.253 the laws pertaining to the removal from an apartment complex parking lot cover what reasons and procedures for vehicle removal.

While towing a vehicle for obstructing gates, garbage dumpsters, or fire lanes may be done without notifying the owners, there are restrictions on property owners from towing a vehicle for expired license plates or registrations.

**Those restrictions are found in 2308.253.**

(e) A contract provision providing for the removal from a parking facility of a vehicle that does not display an unexpired license plate or registration insignia is valid only if the provision requires the owner or operator of the vehicle to be given at least 10 days written notice that the vehicle will be towed from the facility at the vehicle owner's or operator's expense if it is not removed from the parking facility. The notice must be:

- (1) delivered in person to the owner or operator of the vehicle; or
- (2) sent by certified mail, return receipt requested, to that owner or operator.



This certification manual is not designed to replace proper training by an experienced tow operator. This is offered to remind and recommend additional safe recovery steps. Additional hands-on training courses should be attended by all tow operators. Below are some of the quality training courses that are available either at no cost or reasonably priced. These courses will provide training that includes the newest techniques and strategies in the towing industry.

Texas Towing & Storage Association

Web address..... [www.ttsa.org](http://www.ttsa.org) These classes are approved for the renewal of your TDLR license.

Strategic Highway Research Program (SHRP2) These classes provide comprehensive Traffic Incident Management Training. For information on these classes in Texas go to [ttsa.org](http://ttsa.org) or call 832-585-0138