

Instructor Notes: Most towing companies earn good money pulling disabled vehicles out of the mud, but what do you do when it's your tow truck that's stuck? Use this opportunity to talk with your drivers on ways to avoid getting stuck and what they can do once they do get stuck because getting a truck stuck is more "when" than "if."

Safety Meeting 2015 #6 – Getting Stuck and Unstuck



BY PATRICK GRATZIANNA, pgratz548@comcast.net

Whether it's snow, ice, mud, sand or anything slippery, getting your truck stuck is no fun – and even worse when you're driving a tow truck. To avoid grief and aggravation for you and your customer we are going to discuss two things during this safety meeting: how to avoid getting stuck and what to do when you do get stuck.

Get out and scout

First and foremost, the number one rule when pulling someone out of the mud is *don't get stuck yourself*. To prevent getting stuck in the same trap your customer fell into, it's a good idea to walk the recovery area before you commit your truck. Look for soft soil spots or hidden debris (such as stumps underwater). If the soil can't support you, it can't support your truck. In most cases, park your truck on solid ground and winch the disabled vehicle to you. If your cable is not long enough, use cable extensions, recovery chains (avoid using hook up chains) or recovery straps suitable for the load.

Ok ... let's assume you didn't listen and your tow truck is now stuck. Now what?

Rock it out

One of the first things you could do is attempt to rock your truck to free it. In doing so you may gain traction by creating momentum. To do this, completely stop your truck, shift into reverse, keep your wheels straight and gradually accelerate. Once you've moved as far as you can in reverse, apply your brakes and quickly shift into

a low forward gear and drive forward. In some instances, you would benefit from turning your tires side-to-side when moving forward to create more space. If it doesn't work the first time, try and try again.

Get some traction

Getting stuck may have more to do with losing traction than you may realize. If your truck is not buried too deep, you could possibly get unstuck by simply placing something under your drive tires to gain traction. Some ideas include sand, salt, kitty-litter, oil dry, wood, dry branches or even one of your chains. If you have rear outrigger legs, a wheel-lift or an under-reach, you may be able to use them to elevate your drive tires to place traction materials underneath the wheels. By all means do not crawl under an elevated load without jack stands or suitable wooden cribbage.

Another option is to create a wider footprint. Offroader.com recommends dropping air pressure in your tires to gain more traction but that is generally limited to SUVs and light trucks with the idea that you refill them to their proper tire pressure as soon as you're out.

Going deep

According to the theory of "Rolling Resistance," the deeper you are, the worse you are. For example, if your truck was parked on a flat concrete road, you would need to move approximately 5-7 percent of the vehicle's weight to roll the truck forward. If you're stuck in sand, you need to move about 25 percent of the vehicle's

weight. If you're stuck in mud up to the wheels, you need to move 100 percent of the weight, and about 200 percent – twice the truck's weight – if you're stuck up to your fenders. In some cases you can dig your way out, or use your winch provided you have something sturdy from which to pull. Do not attach your winch line to power, light or telephone poles. If you have a tree large enough to support your truck's weight, use wood and a recovery strap to protect the tree's bark.

Speed is dangerous

If you get stuck, don't panic and spin your tires. According to Coopertire.com, the idea is to accelerate slowly, never exceeding 35 mph on your speedometer. The centrifugal forces created by a rapidly spinning tire can cause an explosion by literally tearing the tires apart. Some tires failed in just 3-5 seconds of spinning at high speeds. For these reasons, take it slow and easy and never stand near a spinning tire.

Closing thought

A great deal of problems can be solved with proper planning and your truck's tires are no exception. When you start your next shift, check your tires before you leave the yard and make sure they have adequate tread and are properly inflated. Bald tires can lead to problems on- and off-road.

If you need any ideas on how to prepare and present this information to your drivers, please call me at 847-894-0042 or email me at pgratz548@comcast.net.