

**Instructor Notes:** Even though all 50 states now have some version of a “Move Over” law, towing operators are still susceptible to being hit and killed while working on the side of the road. Use this **Tow Times** Safety Meeting to discuss how your towers can use their trucks to protect themselves and their customers when performing basic road service.

# Safety Meeting 2016 #3 – Safe Towing Tactics: Positioning Your Truck



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**A**s you approach a disabled vehicle, you have two options: park in front of the vehicle or behind it. Generally, the type of call or location of the vehicle may be a deciding factor in how and where you park your truck. For a call that involves a flat tire or out-of-fuel, you may decide to park behind the vehicle. For a jumpstart/possible tow, you would typically park in front of it. In either case, how you park your truck plays a big role in your safety.

## Pulling Up to a Disabled Vehicle

When you pull up behind a disabled vehicle, make sure your tow or service truck is in a safe position. According to the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (MUTCD), “safe-positioned” is defined as, “The positioning of emergency vehicles at an incident in a manner that attempts to protect both the responders performing their duties and road users traveling through the incident scene, while minimizing, to the extent practical, disruption of the adjacent traffic flow.” In other words, you have to strike a balance between protecting yourself and maintaining a safe traffic flow around the emergency scene.

## Protect Yourself: Blocking

When you park behind a disabled vehicle, leave about 1-1/2 truck lengths between your truck and the vehicle. When working on the right shoulder, park slightly to the left of

the disabled vehicle, but completely out of the traffic. Your truck should be slightly angled to traffic (approximately 30-45 degrees), with your truck’s rear end furthest from the lanes of travel and closest to the curb. This position is called, “angled linear blocking” and serves several purposes. First, it creates a protected work area by shielding you, your customer and his or her vehicle in your truck’s shadow. Second, it provides motorists with a visual cue that your truck is not moving and last, it guides motorists to merge or taper into an available lane away from your truck.

## Critical Wheel Angle

Critical wheel angle, also known as “wheels out,” consists of turning the wheels of your parked truck away from the work area so a secondary collision will not push your truck into the disabled vehicle where you and your customer may be standing. Towing operators and road service technicians should work with the assumption that their trucks may be hit by an approaching vehicle and should protect the scene accordingly.

## Zero Buffer

When your truck is parked as a blocker or a shield, the area exposed to oncoming traffic – generally the driver’s side if you’re parked on an angle – is described as having a “zero buffer,” because there is nothing to

protect it from being hit. What this means is that you have to be very cautious getting out of your truck or opening a street-side tool box due to the danger of being struck. Other zero buffer concerns:

- Always use curbside tow truck and car-carrier controls when able.
- If the customer is still inside his or her vehicle, speak to them through the passenger window.
- Maintain situational awareness and plan an escape route before you need one.
- Don’t turn your back to traffic.

## Protect Others: Move it or Work It?

As you pull up to a disabled vehicle, you should ask yourself one simple question: Move it or work it? If the repair on the disabled vehicle is small, there is adequate space to work and weather conditions allow, then it makes sense to perform the repair on the side of the road. If the area is not safe (e.g., the shoulder is very narrow, near high traffic flow, the disabled vehicle is partially in the roadway, you are parked on a curve, etc.) or the repairs are extensive, then it makes sense to move the vehicle to a safer area to work such as a large parking lot or truck stop. According to the National Traffic Incident Management Responder Training Program, they prefer to “move” most disabled vehicles because it clears the roadway quickly, maximizes traffic flow and minimizes traffic backups, thereby