

Instructor Notes: Driving a tow truck requires a great deal of skill, patience and a boatload of common sense, so all safety topics don't have to be complicated to be useful. For example, this month we're discussing the simple idea of parking and how and where it should be done safely.

Safety Meeting 2015 #5 – Truck Parking Hazards



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Towing operators have more than their fair share of headaches when it comes to parking because of their unique circumstances. Sometimes it's just their truck. Sometimes it's their truck and something else on the hook. Other times it's parking the disabled vehicle once they unhook it. During this safety meeting, we'll be discussing a few ideas to prevent crashes and other related losses that pertain to parking, and hopefully save a little money in the process.

Choosing where to park

Before entering a parking lot, make sure that it is not "restricted" and there are no "No Trucks" signs posted. When pulling in, always use the correct entrance, slow down and be prepared for speed bumps. Driving fast over a speed bump empty can cause you to lose equipment and may damage your truck. Driving fast over a speed bump loaded can be worse.

Park defensively. Always look for "drive-through" parking spaces to avoid backing up. If those are unavailable, look for easy-exit parking spaces that don't crowd neighboring vehicles and try to park where there is space around you. The back of the lot will usually have more room than the front, so let other drivers take the risk of all that traffic coming and going. Think safety, not convenience.

Parking lot crashes

A staggering one out of every five vehicle crashes occurs in a parking lot. Traffic laws in some parking lots are lax and almost non-existent because most are considered private

property. Hence, drivers often roll through stop signs, travel against the directional arrows or cut between parked cars. Vehicles can be coming from any direction – at any time – so pay attention.

Avoid equipment theft

Occasionally you will have to park your tow truck and leave it unattended while you eat, take a bathroom break or are talking with a customer and it's those times when you have to be aware of your surroundings. When parking at night, attempt to park in well-lit areas and when possible, park where you can see your truck. If you have to leave your truck unattended, secure it and your equipment as much as possible. Place valuables out of sight, lock windows, doors and toolboxes. If the area is very suspicious, you may want to remove and secure as much of your towing equipment as possible including wheel-lift parts, chains, brooms, shovels, etc.

After you have parked

Once parked, always set the parking brake. If your truck has an automatic transmission, move the shift selector firmly into "park," and then firmly set the parking brake. For a manual transmission, after turning off the engine, shift it into a gear and firmly set the parking brake.

Parking on the side of the road

Think before you park. Parking has become a real problem for many towing operators as states continue to enact parking bans throughout

metropolitan areas. As a rule, avoid using the shoulders for parking unless you are loading a disabled vehicle or your own truck suffers a mechanical problem. Trucks should never be parked on roadways with speed limits over 30 mph unless disabled due to a study conducted by the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration that determined the severity of collisions seem to shift from non-fatal to fatal at speeds higher than 30 mph.

Assuming that it is safe and legal to do so, when parking on the side of the road: if you are parking to face downhill, turn the wheels toward the curb. When facing uphill, turn the wheels away from curb. Avoid parking near driveways, street corners or anywhere else your truck creates an obstruction to other drivers.

Parking a disabled vehicle

When unloading a disabled vehicle, make sure the vehicle stays put. If the disabled vehicle has a transmission or brake problem, you may have to chock the tires to avoid it from rolling. Lastly, secure it as best as possible before leaving.

Parking lots may appear tame but they have their own dangers. Consider these ideas and be as safe as possible the next time you park your truck.

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.