

Tow Truck Driver Safety

by Denise Brown, studioD



A clearly marked safety zone helps protect tow truck drivers from oncoming traffic.

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Tow truck drivers are part of the first responder team at automobile accident scenes, joining police officers and ambulance crews. Any time a driver picks up a disabled vehicle, he must use safety equipment to ensure the safe towing of the vehicle. The safety equipment also makes the tow truck driver more visible to other drivers as he works at an accident scene.

Personal Protection Equipment

The Federal Highway Administration requires that all roadway and emergency workers on or near a federal highway wear a green, orange or yellow fluorescent safety vest that meets American National Standards Institute standards. Three classes of vests are available, with Class 3 offering the most visibility. In addition to vests, the tow truck driver should wear a helmet with the same reflective qualities found in his vest. Gloves are personal protection equipment gear as well.

Safety on the Scene

A driver should monitor any activity around his tow truck as he approaches a disabled vehicle. He should arrive with his emergency lights on, and before exiting the truck, he must check for oncoming traffic approaching the accident or disabled vehicle. As the tow truck driver exits and enters his truck, he should check that he places his feet on the running boards of the truck and use its handrails to keep him from falling. The same is true as he climbs into the tow truck's bed.

Equipment Rating

A tow truck driver is licensed to haul a certain weight of cargo. The gross vehicle weight rating, or GVWR, for light-duty trucks is 10,000 pounds or less. Medium-duty trucks can haul as much as 26,000 pounds, and heavy-duty haulers can move vehicles with a GVWR in excess of 26,000 pounds. The weight ratings also indicate the types of winches and towing cables that can be used on a particular tow truck. The tow truck driver should inspect the cables and winches regularly to ensure that they are in good working order. It's also important that the driver regularly inspect all splices and connectors that fasten the tow wire to the truck and to its hitching devices.

Proper Loading

A tow truck driver must observe proper procedures as he loads a disabled vehicle onto his tow truck. He should work within a designated safety zone to stay out of the way of traffic. The vehicle must be centered on the bed of the tow truck. Once it's in place, the vehicle must be tied down and have its wheels chocked and blocked. If the tow truck has a remote-controlled winch, follow the proper procedures to avoid accidentally activating the winch until it's needed.

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Denise Brown is an education professional who wanted to try something different. Two years and more than 500 articles later, she's enjoying her freelance writing experience for online resources such as Work.com and other online information sites. Brown holds a master's degree in history education from Truman State University.

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