



## Leadership

# Todd Taylor: Working With the Tow and Recovery Industry for Success

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By Todd Taylor

It is 0300 hours, and you are responding to a rear underride. You have a full complement of the newest extrication equipment, the latest technology, and a well-trained crew. As you arrive, you find a four-door sedan under the trailer in the rear with the driver pinned by the rear of the trailer. The trailer is fully loaded with 44,000 pounds of freight. There is little access to the driver and to the dash because of the position of the trailer. What do you do?

This is where we in the fire department have fallen behind. We think that we can handle it because we have the latest technology and training in extrication. As we start to “hack” away at the car, we realize there is little we can do to get the patient out. This article explains what to look for on your 360° walk-around, how we can start the operation, and what the tow industry can do for us.

with knowing your tools and their capabilities. This is accomplished through training.

You must spend time in the junkyard to become comfortable with them. Each tool, especially air bags, has certain reactions when used.

As you arrive at the scene, you must complete a 360°. Start with where the vehicle is sitting. Is there a way to easily get to the patient, or is it going to be an extended extrication? How many patients are there and where are they trapped? Can you even stabilize the scene?

We then have to look at the trailer. This is very important. If it is a van trailer hauling freight, we must determine if the freight has shifted. We are looking for bulges in the sidewalls. The load is one of the variables firefighters do not understand. If you have ever worked on a dock, think of how the freight may have been loaded. The forklift operator may not have much training on how to operate the forklift, not to mention how to properly load the freight. In an accident, the freight could lean to one side causing pressure to be placed on the sidewalls. If we were to try to lift the trailer to make the rescue, we could cause the freight to shift even more and fall on us or the patient. The van trailer is nothing more than a pop can on wheels. It is designed to be light so more freight can be carried.

The next thing we look at are the side rails. These rails can crack during the accident. Without looking at them, we could crack the trailer in half by lifting. If we lifted the trailer with our air bag, and a tear existed, we could cause more issues. Most of us do not carry enough cribbing to control this.

We then move to the front of the trailer. This is the strongest part of the trailer and includes the cab. The driver may not be of help here. He may not want to communicate with you or even be able to. There are so many nationalities driving today that having an interpreter available could be an issue. We just need to ensure that we have completed a lock-out, tag-out. This is simple. First make sure both brakes are set. The yellow handle is for the truck; the red is for the trailer. Then turn the engine off. By doing this, you have made the cab safe.

Go to the front of the trailer and disconnect the “glad hands.” These are two cables coming from the cab to the trailer. The blue one is for service air; the red one is for an emergency. Pulling both locks the brakes to the trailer, allowing for safe stabilization and extrication.

There is no need to open the rear doors. If the load has shifted onto the door, it may fall out. We could also “rack” the trailer, which would make it impossible to lift and hard to stabilize.

After you have completed the size-up, develop an action plan. A good plan will work if all involved know the plan. Do a group hug and explain what you would like. Also make sure you have a plan B. A backup plan can quickly be implemented if your first plan has slowed or is not working. Again, this is where training is the key to success.

In an extrication dealing with heavy vehicles such as semis, the severity of the entrapment is multiplied. If a semi collides with a smaller vehicle, of course, the smaller vehicle will suffer the most damage. The amount and type of entrapment are magnified as well—more intrusion, more dash entrapment, and so on.

When a semi collides with another semi, it can also be catastrophic. There is little front crash protection in most semis. Manufactures have started placing air bags in the cabs, but most do not have any. There are no crumple zones and there is little energy displacement in these vehicles. The other issue is the time involved with extrication. It is difficult to find these types of vehicles to train on, so our experience is not as vast. Using some of the techniques we use in passenger car extrication will not work on a large vehicle. The interior configuration is vastly different from what we normally see. In a lot of extrication, we see rescuers doing what they can with what they have to work with. Extrication times of more than an hour are common for this type of incident. Again, we simply do not have the resources to train properly and find the best techniques. This is the first area in which our partners in the tow and recovery business can help. They own the junkyards and can possibly provide us with the vehicles.

## Working with the Tow Industry

Learn what they know about these vehicles and the loads they carry. The tow and recover industry respond to all accidents big and small, injury or not. They are the people who have to clean up after us. When a semi overturns on the roadway, the tow industry rights it, manages the load, and transports. They have learned the ins and outs of load management. This is one of the first areas we must train in with them. They can teach us how loads will react in different lifting situations. They also carry a great deal of specialized equipment; most of it would be either too expensive or too cumbersome for the fire department to have in its cache. But the recovery operator must have this to complete the recovery successfully. He also has the training and experience in using this type of equipment in a recovery. Even though it is a recovery, he must use as much caution as if there was a live person. He is responsible for whatever happens to the load. If he damages the load unnecessarily, he is liable. His livelihood depends on how well he can complete the mission.

Not all operators are created the same. There is no required training or certification. There is training out there, and a reputable company will send its personnel to the training. As with the fire department, this training is key to the success of the rescue or recovery.

If you decide to work with the tow and recovery in your area, first meet with its personnel. Look at its equipment; it should look as your rigs do. Everything has a place, and everything is in its place. The chains are not lying in a puddle of water at the bottom of the compartment. They are oiled and hung to be accessible. Look at the winch cables. Are they neatly wound, or do they look like a bird's nest. If they are not properly maintained, they could fail and injure anyone in the area. They should show pride in their equipment. If they have a good work ethic, they most likely will be experienced and be willing and able to help.

If you have trained with them and need them on a rescue, here are some points to remember.

1. Call early. They have to get on the road and have no sirens.
2. Leave space for them to set up. They have outriggers like a ladder truck, and they are generally 16-18 feet. They have to be close enough not to overreach the boom. The farther out the boom, the less weight they can pick.
3. Ask what they can do. They will be able to help you secure the load. They can offer their experience, and they are ultimately responsible for the lift. Let them make it.
4. Train prior to calling. You will know each other by name. You have worked together in the past. You will know each other's capabilities. This makes everyone more comfortable and open for suggestions.

Make sure you train for these accidents. They can be time consuming, but through training you can figure them out. Work with your local heavy tow operator. Learn how to make your job better.

## BIO

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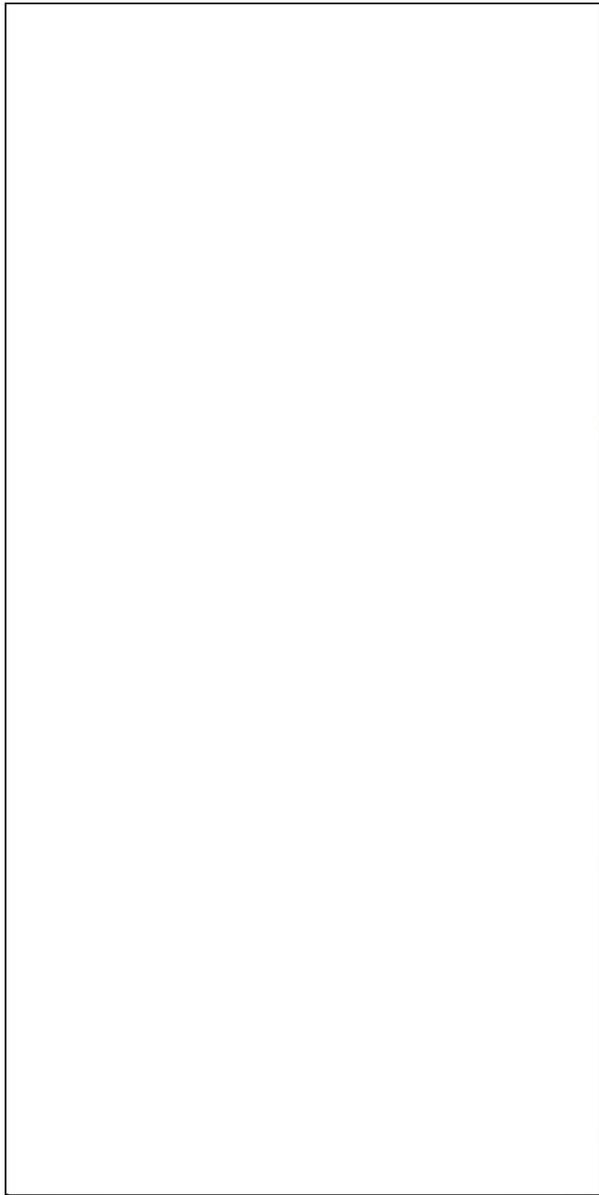


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