

How Tow Truck Drivers Are at Risk

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When you see them you are most likely in trouble, you may be broken down in the traffic lane or on the side of the roadway, but they will respond. It doesn't matter whether it's 2 in the afternoon or 2 in the morning, on Christmas Eve or Easter Sunday they show up to offer assistance. They may be driving a flat bed or a tow truck or running out to your location with five gallons of fuel. They are tow truck operators.

From experience I know that they are a special breed that is one part cowboy and two parts Good Samaritan. Their unkempt appearance goes with the territory, but common to all who I have known is an interest in aiding drivers in need of help. With the exception of the ambulance chaser variety that gives all the legitimate companies a bad name, towers are essential to the smooth and safe operation of the roads that connect everything from neighborhoods to the two coasts of our country.

Move over laws

Increasingly, though, the work they do puts them at risk of serious injury or death. So much so, that every jurisdiction in the nation except for the District of Columbia and Hawaii have passed move over laws which in most cases require motorists to move to a non-adjacent lane and reduce speed when encountering emergency vehicles with lights that are flashing.

A new law in Colorado makes it a crime to get behind the wheel of a vehicle being towed that has been designated by the tower with a large sticker that warns of the legal consequences of doing so. Sadly the law was prompted by the dragging death of a tow truck driver who was killed

after he became entangled in a cable attached to a vehicle he was attempting to tow. The other provision of the Allen Rose Tow Truck Safety Act is that motorists must move over for tow trucks in the same manner required for other emergency vehicles.

Deaths may be widespread and under reported

Fatality statistics for tow truck operators are non-existent, but evidence of their occurrence is staggering. A search for "tow truck driver killed" produces numerous matches clustered within a tight time frame from throughout the nation. Once the researcher drills down into the article the details are commonly similar - a driver has been killed while loading a disabled vehicle onto a flatbed or while hooking up his wrecker in an attempt to clear the highway.

Distracted driving and increased speed from the lack of time management are no doubt factors in these tragedies. As the online news reports and attached comments indicate, the stakes are extremely high in these fatalities. The victims are beloved heads of households and at times towing company owners who have been struck down in their prime leaving an aftermath of broken hearts, single parents and financial hardship in their absence.

As Kathy Schmidt wrote when Mark Angelo 51 of Lyndhurst, New Jersey, was struck and killed while loading a car onto his truck last fall, "...people need to slow down and move over. I drive a tow truck and I want to be able to go home every night to see my daughter!"