

Six Steps for Safely Extracting Stuck Vehicles in the Field

One of the regular hassles in the agricultural sector is getting trucks or tractors stuck in the mud, dirt or snow.

Unfortunately, during these times workers stand a greater chance of getting injured, or worse. Serious, disabling injuries and deaths have occurred when a towing device failed.

But you can avoid the chances of that happening by training your workers in safe towing practices when dislodging a stuck vehicle.

Safety techniques will vary depending, among other things, on:

- Soil conditions.
- How deep a vehicle is stuck.
- How much the stuck vehicle weighs.
- How much the towing vehicle weighs.

Train your workers to follow these six steps:

First step: Breathe easy

Too often the workers and supervisors are in too much of a hurry to extract the vehicle. When people are rushing, they tend to make mistakes, and they can be costly in terms of property damage and injuries.

Second step: Know the weights

Determine how much weight you need to move and how heavy the towing vehicle needs to be. You can get the deadweight in your vehicle owner's manual. But you need to calculate the total gross weight of what is stuck, including the vehicle, possible trailer, and the payload that you will need to pull.

A good rule of thumb is that the towing vehicle needs to be of equal weight to the stuck vehicle.

If the vehicle is only slightly stuck, then the weight of the pulling equipment should be at least equal to the loaded weight of the stuck vehicle. Improve traction by removing or digging out mud or dirt around the sidewalls and in front of the tires.

Ideally, you want to position the towing vehicle on higher ground.

Third step: Clear the gawkers

Extractions and stuck vehicles always attract onlookers. Clear the area of non-essential personnel for everyone's safety.

Fourth step: Use a proper device

A long towing chain designed to support the towed load is recommended over nylon ropes or cables. Chains will break at their weakest point, so check welds and hooks prior to use.

Fifth step: Precautions

You should always do the following:

- Assess how badly the equipment is stuck and figure out if further damage may result if you continue. If so, call a professional.
- Determine whether the axles are dragging.
- Determine if the vehicle bellied out or is resting on the frame.
- Can the cargo shift if the equipment is pulled?
- Assess the condition of the ground under the pulling vehicle.
- Take steps to protect drivers and bystanders from flying debris.
- Determine whether the equipment is leaning to one side.
- Know where power lines are located, to avoid contact with them.

Sixth step: Pre-towing checks/coordination

Double-check all attachments to ensure they are secure.

If using more than one pulling vehicle, the drivers must coordinate with each other. Everyone else involved should know the plan for extraction.

Each operator should understand the situations that will stop the towing process. If using hand signals to communicate between operators, ensure everyone knows their meaning.

When starting to tow, apply power smoothly with no jerking.

Stop and re-evaluate at the slightest sign of danger, if the tractor front end lifts off the ground or if there is a slip in the towing device.

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