

SURVIVE Best Practice Guidelines

Use of a Tow Pole

Roadside Technicians are encouraged to apply Dynamic Risk Assessment techniques to identify and control hazards at the scene of a breakdown.

Whilst using specialist recovery equipment to totally or partially lift the broken-down vehicle is generally the safest option, there are occasions where a tow pole may prove to be the best option, taking account of all the circumstances of an individual breakdown, such as a prompt removal of a casualty vehicle from a dangerous location. However, using a tow pole for a recovery can introduce further hazards, including relying on an often inexperienced person (normally the driver of the broken-down vehicle) to partially control the vehicle being recovered whilst being towed.

There have unfortunately been examples of incidents occurring (some serious) when this method of recovery has been adopted, and the following advice is intended to provide guidance for the recovery industry to help control such risks.

Equipment

The following items of equipment are essential for completing recoveries using this method of towing:

The towing vehicle must comply with the requirements of PAS 43 in terms of lighting, livery, and all other relevant features enabling it to function legally and safely at roadside.

- The vehicle must be otherwise suitable for the recovery of the broken-down vehicle, for example in terms of gross weight capabilities, general maintenance, and be equipped with a suitably approved tow bar and coupling.
- A suitable tow pole and attachments. A hinged self-locking tow pole is preferred to facilitate a speedy and safe connection between the two vehicles.
- A suitable and correctly functioning trailer lighting board should be attached to the vehicle being recovered wherever reasonably practicable. A rapidly attachable (e.g. magnetic), and purpose-made “On-Tow” sign may also be supplied to facilitate a rapid removal from a scene. This should only be used when it is safe to do so (e.g. when the casualty vehicles rear lamps and indicators are operative), and ideally just to move the vehicle to a suitably safe location for the trailer lighting board to be attached for the remainder of the recovery.
- The Technician must use suitable PPE whilst attending the vehicle, in line with PAS 43 requirements.
- Replacement items must be made freely available to the technician.
- All equipment must be examined regularly by a suitably competent person within the scope of the manufacturer’s guidelines and the Provision and use of Work Equipment Regulations.

Documentation

The Technician must be supplied with the following documentation (may be in an electronic format as appropriate):

- Details of the service vehicles operational weight (e.g. weighbridge document) and gross train weight.
- Relevant instructions (hard copy or electronic) for using this equipment to include all aspects included in Appendix 1. This will include access to Safe Systems of Work included in relevant risk assessments issued by the company.
- Customer towing guide (hard copy or electronic) to include all aspects of Appendix 2.
- A disclaimer form for the customer to sign confirming that they have understood and will follow the guidance given in the customer towing guide and by the attending technician.
- Technical data on vehicles being recovered to include technical capability (e.g. damage to transmission), typical kerb weight details, etc.

Training

Technicians should receive suitable training before using tow poles. The training should, as a minimum, cover the following subjects:

- Examples of when the equipment should (and should not) be used. Generally, the tow pole should be used as a last option, and then only for such a period/distance until a superior method of recovery (i.e. where the broken-down vehicle is partially or totally lifted) can be adopted.
- Inspection and maintenance of the tow pole and associated equipment (e.g. Tow bar, Trailer lighting board, etc.) for correct and safe operation. This should include how to obtain spare and replacement items.
- Calculating the service vehicle's towing weight capabilities, and using technical data to assess the weight of the broken-down vehicle.
- Assessing the suitability of the broken-down vehicle to be towed using a tow pole to include: security and suitability of the coupling (e.g. towing eye), use and application of technical information, the nature and relevance of the vehicle fault, vehicle towing weights, etc.
- Assessing the suitability of the driver to be towed using this equipment safely. This will include asking questions to check understanding, assessing the customer's physical capabilities, etc. Where additional passengers are carried, the technician to be made aware that the maximum speed during the tow is restricted to 30MPH, and this needs to be a factor in the Dynamic Risk Assessment (e.g. on a high speed road).
- Use of the driver guidelines and the completion of the disclaimer by the driver.
- The method(s) of communication between the technician and the driver to be adopted during the recovery.
- A practical session should include the coupling and uncoupling of the tow pole and associated equipment (e.g. Trailer lighting board). This should include keeping the time spent in the 'sandwich zone' to a minimum, safe use and storage of components, etc.
- The practical session should also include the technician using the equipment to tow a vehicle, and then acting as a "steersman" whilst being towed. This is considered as essential to fully appreciate the demands placed on those involved, wherever possible this should be completed off the public highway to minimise risk.

- The technician must be left confident to ask for assistance from other resources (e.g. a recovery truck) in situations where it is deemed unsafe to recover a vehicle using the tow pole. Any organisational bonus/reward schemes should take account of this requirement.

Appendix 1.

Technician instructions for using this equipment are to include as a minimum the information listed below:

- Assessing the suitability of the vehicle to be towed, to include:
 - Service vehicle train weight (or other relevant safe weight limits) are not exceeded.
 - A safe and suitable method of attachment of the pole to the broken-down vehicle is available.
 - Referring to available technical data (or referral if not available) to determine technical capabilities/restrictions of the vehicle relative to the planned recovery.
 - Considering the relevance of the vehicle fault/condition to using the tow pole, for example – this would not be a suitable method of recovering a vehicle with defective steering, etc.
 - If in doubt, do not continue with the tow.
 - Ensuring the broken-down vehicle's battery has sufficient capacity to sound the horn or use the headlamps as a method of communication with the technician.
- Assessing the suitability of the customer/driver to be towed, to include:
 - Checking understanding of the drivers understanding of the guidance given. Particular emphasis to be given to the need to follow the path of the service vehicle at all times during the recovery.
 - Assessing the customer appears physically able to control a vehicle being towed using a pole, taking account of heavier steering loads, etc.
 - Checking that the customer is happy to be towed on the planned route/distance - to be confirmed by customer's signature on disclaimer prior to commencing journey.
- The Tow itself:
 - The Service van will handle differently whist towing.
 - Due to the customer's inexperience and the heavier forces required to control the vehicle being towed, all acceleration, changing direction, and braking activities should be executed more gradually than normal and with early signals to advise others of your intentions.
 - Be prepared to stop in a safe location if the customer communicates by sounding the horn/flashing lamps, or otherwise gives cause for concern. Reiterate the key points of the customer guidance document with the customer and again check their understanding before continuing with the tow. **If in doubt do not continue with the tow pole and arrange another method of recovery.**
 - Use your mirrors more frequently than normal, particularly during the early phases of the recovery, to ensure the customer is following correctly.

- Where your maximum speed is significantly less than prevailing traffic you **may** consider use of your beacons to warn other road users. However, always take account of the possible distraction this may cause to the customer being towed, and switch them off when they are no longer required (e.g. when your speed becomes similar to other traffic).
 - Unless other circumstances dictate a lower speed (e.g. road conditions/speed limits, weather conditions etc.) a maximum speed of 40 mph applies. A maximum speed of 30 mph applies where any passengers are carried in the casualty vehicle in addition to the driver.
 - As a general rule, tows exceeding 10 miles should not be undertaken using a tow pole. However, where common sense dictates (e.g. the motorway services are a little further on) this can be exceeded accordingly.
 - Where possible, agree with the customer where you are likely to stop at the end of the journey - reminding them not to steer into their driveway, for example if the destination is their home address. If necessary, stop short of the final destination in a safe location to reiterate any relevant instructions or advice.
- On completion of The Tow:
 - Making safe the vehicles and uncoupling the Tow Pole and removing any other associated equipment.
 - Removal of the broken down vehicle towing eye, if required and otherwise returning it returning to its pre-recovery state.
 - Encouraging the customer/driver to inspect the vehicle and obtain their confirmation (by signing the disclaimer/declaration documents, if supplied) that no damage has occurred.

Appendix 2.

The customer should always be given a towing guide information (a document to read, suitable pictograms, or video, for example) prior to their involvement using this equipment. This should include as a minimum the information listed below:

- The effort required to steer and brake the vehicle are likely to be significantly increased without the engine running.
- Ensure the ignition remains switched “on” (and therefore the steering lock “off”) for the entire journey wherever this does not create further hazards and/or damage.
- The vehicle hazard lamps must be switched off for the entire journey to prevent confusing other road-users.
- The seatbelt is to be worn by the driver and any passengers as when driving normally. Where passengers are carried in addition to the driver, a speed restriction of 30MPH will be applicable.
- The gear selector must remain in neutral position for the whole journey.
- The handbrake should be released prior to setting off and remain so whilst the vehicle is being towed.
- Whilst being towed use the footbrake to brake as the service vehicle brakes, and use the same direction indicator signals as the service van.
- You **must** stay in the same path as the service van during the tow. Do not wander from outside of this path to obtain a better forward view or for any

other reason, and anticipate the vehicle may not follow your normal or expected route.

- Avoid any other distractions – your in-car entertainment systems and any satellite navigation devices should remain “off”, for example and you must **never** use a mobile telephone device for any purpose, including “hands-free” mode for the duration of the recovery.
- If you would like the Technician to stop whilst being towed, sound your horn or flash your headlamps to alert them. They will then stop at a convenient and safe location, which may be some distance ahead.

SURVIVE Group
February 2017