

Safety and health alert

58/99 Tow truck accident endangers lives

Incident

A car driver with a passenger was returning home at night and saw what appeared to be oncoming white lights on his side of the road. However, the vehicle he crashed into was stationary and in the process of being hooked-up behind a tow truck.

The driver of the tow truck was under the raised vehicle to be towed, setting up the tow hooks. The owner of the disabled vehicle was also in the immediate vicinity. The tow truck driver and owner of the disabled vehicle managed to scramble clear before the collision between the approaching vehicle and the disabled vehicle.

The accident could have resulted in serious injuries or death. There is a significant risk that similar accidents will occur again unless control measures are introduced.

Factors

1. It was night and in an area with inadequate lighting. Visibility was further restricted by dust from road works.
2. The tow truck driver failed to place warning cones or reflective triangles before and after the disabled vehicle and tow truck. There was no warning for approaching drivers leaving a 110 km per hour zone.
3. The tow truck roof spotlights shone in the direction of approaching traffic, seriously reducing visibility for drivers.
4. The road was under repair with a blue metal aggregate reseal, with no reflective road markings or posts. Signs warning of road works had blown down.
5. The tow truck driver was young and without adequate training.

Recommendations

Several control measures could have prevented this accident, which resulted from a combination of hazards.

1. Warning cones or reflective triangles must be carried on tow trucks and used, under the *Road Traffic Code 1975*. They should be placed at strategic points alerting other drivers to hazards and giving them time to react.
2. Tow truck drivers should carry a torch, preferably with a white front light and coloured rear light.
3. Spotlights or other lights should not be directed so as to restrict the vision of other drivers.
4. All tow truck drivers should be adequately trained. WorkSafe Western Australia has concluded that the level of training, knowledge and skills for tow truck drivers is generally not adequate. The *Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984* requires employers to provide, as far as is practicable, information, instruction, training and



supervision so that employees are not exposed to hazards in the workplace. The Act also requires employers to ensure their work does not expose non-employees to hazards. Training such as the National Road Transport Industry Training Council of WA's *Tow Truck Operators Course* will help employers comply with the Act.

5. Road repairers should minimise hazards for motorists with control measures that include:

- warning signs, positioned and secured to warn drivers of changing road conditions
- reflective posts or markers indicating road borders
- covering or removing road speed signs in areas where road repairs require lower speeds

For guidance refer to Australian Standard AS1742 part 3, *Manual of Uniform Traffic Control devices - Traffic Control devices for Works on Roads*.

6. Tow truck drivers should wear reflective tape or clothing to increase their visibility to motorists.

Further Information

Further information can be obtained from the WorkSafe internet site www.worksafe.wa.gov.au, or by contacting customer service on 1300 307 877 or email: safety@docep.wa.gov.au.

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