

Driver Troy Grabowsky, Mario's Towing, performing a pre-trip inspection before heading out to work.

Online course offers OHS Regulation updates

By Sarah Ripplinger

Tow truck operators work 24/7 in all kinds of weather and road conditions. Some calls put them in close proximity to fast-moving vehicles and complex traffic situations. They get called to accident scenes for the removal of damaged vehicles, and their work often continues after paramedics and other first responders have left the scene.

On December 1, 2021, amendments to the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Regulation came into effect to better protect tow workers. The changes to Part 18 of the Regulation align with the latest edition of the Traffic Management Manual for Work on Roadways issued by the BC Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MoTI).

"Tow truck drivers can become accustomed to risks associated with their work," notes Dale Alcock, supervisor, Prevention Field Services, with WorkSafeBC in Kelowna. "This rewritten Regulation recognizes the important work tow truck operators

carry out as part of emergency scene management. Employers need to inform their workers about the hazards of moving traffic and factors that may put them at risk of injury." The updates also outline that an employer must develop and implement controls that eliminate or reduce risks for these workers, to the lowest level.

"Whenever traffic control measures are needed — for example, working to take a vehicle out of a ditch — employers should have a safety plan and protocols in place for workers to follow," says Alcock.

Employers are encouraged to investigate partnering with traffic control companies for flagging and other hazard identification equipment, Alcock adds.

"In many ways, the regulatory amendments are a paradigm shift across the industry, designed to bring into effect risk management-based principles to minimize risks and better protect workers."

What to know about the changes

The OHS Regulation amendments have established new definitions and requirements for different types

and duration of work: from brief-, long-, and short-duration work to emergency work. For example, towing and recovery operators who present at an emergency scene where traffic control is required are now classified as “emergency responders.”

Other changes include:

- Requirements for written risk assessments and traffic control plans
- New flagging requirements for tows that take longer than 15 minutes
- Using traffic control persons only after other control measures have been deemed insufficient in a given circumstance and only when safe and permissible — roads with speed limits that exceed 70 km/h are prohibited
- Minimizing worker exposure to traffic in work zones — including using constructed detours, alternative routes, or barriers — or through control measures such as temporary traffic control devices or administrative controls
- New requirements for the positioning of traffic control persons, training for all workers involved in controlling traffic, and supervision of traffic control

Online training available for new guidelines

To make it easier for employers and tow truck operators to become familiar with the amendments, the Automotive Retailers Association (ARA) created an Emergency Response Traffic Control for Towing and Recovery Operators online course that breaks down all sections of the new training requirements into several modules.

“First and foremost, it’s about why tow operators need to understand how to set up an effective traffic control zone,” says Ken Hendricks, senior advisor with the ARA. “Next, the course provides essential information about how to properly conduct a risk assessment and what’s involved with that. It explains the essential steps and considerations before a worker begins work — which are extremely important.”

The course provides an overview of the most up-to-date information outlined in the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure’s traffic management manual. This includes tools and resources that explain various aspects of the work zone, principles of traffic

management, how to use a buffer vehicle to protect the workplace, how to conduct a risk assessment, personal protective clothing, and traffic control devices and equipment.

The online training costs \$39 and can be completed anytime in approximately 2 to 2.5 hours, making it an accessible option for tow workers across the province, says Hendricks. “The towing and recovery technical advisory committee and others helped us create the course curriculum.”

The responsibility for conducting practical assessments of tow operators’ ability to apply the knowledge they acquire in the course to real-life situations will rest with employers, he adds.

Making safety the motto

For Nicholas Moretto, general manager at Mario’s Towing Ltd., based in Kelowna, B.C., worker safety is paramount at the family owned and operated business.

Moretto grew up riding alongside his dad to towing jobs. “It was our time together,” recalls the now 39-year-old who has three kids of his own. Safety was the cardinal rule, even at a time when industry standards and regulations were much different than they are today.

Now overseeing more than 100 tow operator employees and an equal number of trucks, Moretto is still focused on safety, providing his staff with the training, equipment, and support they need to stay safe on the job.

It’s first-hand experience for me,” states Moretto. “My dad always said to me, ‘Never ask anybody to do anything you wouldn’t be willing to do’. Take care of your staff; get them home safe.”

Simple steps can save a life

Mario’s Towing Ltd. asks all drivers to do a site assessment to determine if the tow scene is safe and if they need flagging, such as illuminated signage or personnel to direct traffic around a tow site.

The company’s employees are provided personal protective equipment, such as safety vests, steel-toe boots, and gloves, as well as hard hats for when there are overhead hazards. A supervisor and support staff are only a phone call away, as are online training documents through the company’s website.

New hires are partnered with a senior driver for their first week of work before starting with easier tows, such as smaller vehicles and less complex scenarios. They work their way up to situations that require more practical knowledge, such as hauling semi-trucks and working on busier roadways or at challenging crash sites.

About half of the workers at Mario's Towing have completed WreckMaster training for light, medium, and heavy duty tow scenarios.

"Mario's Towing has invested time and money to ensure worker safety comes first," says Moretto. He hopes other employers and contractors will take heed of the new regulations, and make the necessary changes to keep everyone in the industry safe.

"My uncle was hit and killed in Castlegar doing a tow on the side of the road with the beacons on," Moretto shares. "It's important to me that we protect workers and the reputation of our industry."

To take the ARA's new online course, visit ara.bc.ca and select Training, then View courses, and scroll down to select "Emergency Response Traffic Control for Tow and Recovery Operators". ☺



Jeff Russell, occupational safety officer with WorkSafeBC, discusses the importance of driver and vehicle safety with Mario's Towing staff, Nick Moretto, general manager, and Troy Grabowsky, driver, at its Kelowna workyard.



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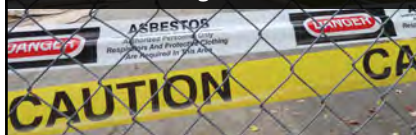
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