

Mr. Morasch,

I recently read your article about towing bills in the landline magazine. I know that some towers do have some outrageous charges, but so do some trucking companies for delivering freight. There are reasons that recovery bills have gotten higher in the last several years and I will explain them one at a time below. I have been involved in the towing and recovery industry my entire life and have seen our own heavy duty bills range from \$100 to over \$20,000. I found some holes in your article to which maybe I can enlighten you and fill in those gaps.

1. EQUIPMENT- There is a big difference between towing and recovery, the equipment required to do each job is very different, many companies specialize in either segment or dedicate trucks to each segment for several reasons. A heavy duty recovery truck must be heavy and decked out with big winches, heavy recovery chains, straps, shackles, oak lumber (a minimum 8, 4"x 6" x 5'), not to mention a wide variety of tools both normal and specialized. This makes the weight of the recovery truck most likely unable to tow a tractor-trailer and make legal weight on its drive axles (tandem or triple). The cost of these trucks has increased into the hundreds of thousands of dollars for a USED wrecker. In order to tow, a company now has to have a towing unit that is considerably lighter to meet DOT standards.
2. To an accident scene, there are 4 first responders. Police, Fire, Ambulance (EMS), and Wrecker. Of the four responders wreckers are the ONLY ones who are not subsidized by federal or state governments. A properly equipped heavy duty wrecker has just as much, if not more dollars worth of equipment on scene than any of the other responders. Once the wrecker company arrives, most generally the responsibility of the casualty, removal, reshipment, and disposal of the cargo is transferred from the other responders to the towing/recovery company. The towing company is in charge of finding the resources, man power, and equipment to safely restore the highway or ditch to the same condition it was before the accident.
 - a. A normal recovery chain costs approximately \$300 to get into my toolbox after product, shipping, and taxes. For a safe recovery of a 40,000# + combination, there is a minimum of 5 of these chains required.
 - b. A normal recovery strap and the hardware required to be combined with it not including the chains listed above is approximately \$750 per strap. Again a minimum of 5 of these would be required for a 40,000# + set up.
 - i. And this does not include any other equipment such as wire rope, hooks, block and tackles (snatch blocks), etc.
3. Just like our equipment, most heavy duty operators are professionally trained and certified to do their jobs safely. There is more than meets the eye when recovering a rolled tractor-trailer.
 - a. We have saved our customers hundreds of thousands of dollars in hazardous material cleanup bills because our first step is to contain any and all fuel, oil, or antifreeze spills on the scene.
 - b. I once saw a hazmat bill for \$55,000 for a clean up that required the removal of less than 15 gallons of dirt.

4. LABOR AND SPECIALIZED EQUIPMENT-You referred to a large bill offloading cargo from a rolled-over tractor trailer, presumably on its side. Have you ever unloaded spilled cargo? I have done many, many jobs like this.
 - a. The FDA or state equivalent agency must be contacted anytime there is food involved. Their involvement can slow down the work progress because they have tasks that they must also perform on the scene.
 - b. The cargo is always on its side or top just like the casualty that wrecked, making unloading way more difficult than just a routine trailer unload, and normally you have to have specialized unloading equipment to do the job on the site, not back in the luxury of the business's parking lot. Have you ever contracted a forklift or loader from a rental company or service such as a cartage company and request the service "right now" to get the highway cleared? We have invested in much of the equipment ourselves for this reason and we do charge a premium price comparable to those specialized companies because we have the equipment right there and ready to go at a moment's notice.
 - c. It usually takes more than one or two men to do the job and usually a premium is paid to get workers to the accident scene in hurry to get the highway cleared. In our case, our off duty employees know what they will be paid per hour when we call them in on a truck wreck and we have to pay them a premium to get them on their days off.
 - i. Have you ever tried to unload any cargo from a wrecked trailer lying on its side and on a 45 degree or steeper incline? How about the same scenario in blistering 100 degree heat or a blizzard with the temperatures in the single digits? It can take many hours to complete such a task especially with the conditions listed above or waiting on a truck to put the cargo back into. i.e. refrigerated produce that has to be kept in the trailer while on its side until another refrigerated trailer can arrive on the scene and then be offloaded and reloaded into the new trailer to salvage the precious cargo.
 - d. Also a point that I did not touch on is that many times companies leave their trucks "clocked" in on accident scenes during the offloading process, this is done because that truck is tied up on that scene and cannot be pulled off of it to do other calls. Once a towing company has received that call it is in their "duty of care" (i.e. care, custody, and control). There is too much liability on the towing company to leave the scene uncontrolled.
 - i. State and Federal laws require us to have cones, accident ahead signs, traffic controllers, and many of us have to be certified just like a state highway worker. This all costs money, nobody buys these products or classes for us.
5. Insurance rates, now comes the beast, insurance companies want to whine about what the tower is charging but lets look at what the insurance company is charging the tower. We have a small towing and recovery business and we pay a very large sum per year in insurance with no damage claims.

6. Storage charges- The reasons that storage at a towing company costs so much are very simple.
- a. The storage yard must be registered at the state, pay a licensing fee, comply with mandates such as fencing and beautification policies which are often costly, must carry enough insurance to cover whatever is being stored in the lot based on a dollar value. The laws that our storage facilities are required to meet are very different than those of a u-store or monthly rental stall.
 - b. The sheer cost of real estate and the amount of area that is required to park wrecked tractor-trailers is considerably larger than parking a normal tractor trailer. Have you ever tried parking a tractor-trailer hooked on behind a tow truck? It is even more difficult when the towed casualty has been wrecked and doesn't pull or back "true".
 - c. Many times the insurance companies will leave the wrecked salvage for months on the towing company's lot taking up valuable storage real estate.

I think that you will find that most companies doing recovery are charging a fair price of their jobs; you have to remember we do this as a business to make a profit. We are no different from the truck driver that delivers products across the country at a price above his costs. We are all entitled to make our living. Many times the tragedy of the instances that you are talking about is that the company has underinsured their truck, trailer, or cargo in order to cut costs. The other thing is that the liability insurance should pay to have the wreckage removed from the highway because there are costs incurred in doing so. The wreckage cannot simply be left on the highway. This article should have focused on the fact that the liability insurance of the trucking company did not pay to have the highway cleared.

In closing, I hope that my perspective sheds some light on the issue that your article covered, the costs of doing business for the towing companies are increasing with no reprieve and since we are not subsidized, we must pass this cost on to the end user, who just happens to be our customers whether that is insurance companies, or vehicle owners. Personally, we itemize our bills and show exactly what we are charging our customers for. We also include a detailed story explaining what actions were taken and why those actions were taken. We try to charge a fair rate for our services and make the profit that we need to stay in business. I think that you will find most towing companies do the same.

Sincerely,
Jason Strickland
Strickland Towing of Wellington, KS
Strickland Road Service of South Haven, KS
www.stricklandroadservice.com
cell: 620-968-7584