

# Safety Alert OF THE MONTH

October 2014

PLEASE PASS THIS ON TO PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS IN BC'S FOREST INDUSTRY

## Winch Safety

*"That mud hole looks deeper than it was last Thursday; I think the weekend hunters may have chewed up the trail more than we thought."*

*"Yes, and the storm last night didn't help either. Maybe get out and have a closer look, Paul."*

*Sure..... Yes, it's deep, but it has a solid bottom. High on the right hand side looks best, Jim."*

*"OK. Stand clear, partner..... Rats. That's not going to work. I'll try it gently in reverse, and see if we can ease out of this one."*

*"No, hold on there Jim. I think we're going to spin 'er down even worse if we push it. Let's take advantage of our winch. Sure glad I brought my rubber boots."*



If your work day takes you and your pickup or ATV on forestry back roads, chances are you have first-hand experience of how getting stuck can complicate an otherwise productive day. If you have a winch on your rig, you've got an ace in the hole. But using it properly can mean the difference between a minor delay and a damaged vehicle or a nasty injury. Here are a few suggestions for winching success.

### Prevention

The best way to avoid winching injuries and damaged equipment is to not put yourself in a situation where you need to use one. Make conservative driving choices; don't push yourself, or let others push you, into unnecessary risks or driving situations that have a low probability of success.

Evaluate each mud hole, cross-ditch and obstacle. If you're unsure, hop out and look. How deep is it? Is it a gravel bottom or slippery mud? Is there a route around? If you do get stuck, are there solid anchors or trees to winch to? Maybe it's better to find a place to park, and walk from there.



# Safety Alert OF THE MONTH

PLEASE PASS THIS ON TO PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS IN BC'S FOREST INDUSTRY

## *Preparation*

You likely don't use your winch frequently, but it's reassuring to know it's ready when you need it. Inspect the winch and equipment as part of your vehicle inspection. Confirm tow hook and mounting bolts are tight. Check winch operation (controls work, winch engages / disengages, etc.) and the cable is in good condition (free of kinks and frays).

Have capable equipment and the right accessories. Your winching gear should include: snug leather gloves with a sturdy palm, hook strap, snatch block, clevis (or D-shackle), tree protectors, extra chain, shovel, hand tools and an extra tow line. Have a heavy blanket to place over the cable to absorb energy in the event the cable fails. Carry booster cables. If you winch often, consider installing dual batteries.



Read the winch Owner's Manual, and keep it with you.

Develop the skills before you need them. Learn winch components and how to operate them on dry land (before you're stuck). Have someone explain the hazards you'll need to evaluate and address as you develop your winching plan. Know the common configurations and procedures (see sections below)

Practice! Unused skills and knowledge fade quickly. Take an hour or two each field season to practice your skills. Include your co-workers, and you'll likely learn a couple of handy tips from their experiences.

## *Using a Winch*

The key to winching success is what you do before you press the "go" button – how you identify hazards, the plan you build to mitigate them, how you hook up equipment, how you instruct and utilize others. Build a plan using available knowledge; include your partner. Take time to think it all the way through.

Designate one person to operate controls. From a safe vantage point, have others watch for things the operator can't see, and relay information to the operator.

Communicate. Usually, verbal communication works fine. If you use hand signals, make sure everyone agrees what each signal means.



# Safety Alert OF THE MONTH

PLEASE PASS THIS ON TO PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS IN BC'S FOREST INDUSTRY

**Winches are strong enough to break or pull over poorly rooted trees. Select sturdy anchors - well rooted trees or large rocks. Tug-test them and keep an eye on them as you pull. Wear your PPE - gloves, eye and head protection.**

**Watch for jagers. Probably the most common winching injury occurs when a sharp "jagger" protrudes from the cable and penetrates a finger or hand. Gloves are a must when handling cable, but some jagers penetrate gloves. Pay attention when handling cable; don't slide your hand along it.**

**Check and double-check. Once you've got things hooked up, gently and gradually take up the slack. Watch the progress to confirm the line runs smoothly through snatch blocks. Ensure each clevis is secure and aligned. Watch the cable for kinks or other damage. Are the anchors holding?**

**Periodically stop and check that the cable winds tightly and evenly onto the drum.**

**Stay out of the bight! Everyone should stand back far enough to avoid a snapped cable. Stand at 90 degrees to the direction of the primary pull.**

**Rather than trying to explain winching techniques, your best bet is to check out a few of the videos below and download the winching guide. And practice on dry land before you're stuck in the mud.**

*"How does it look over on your side, Paul?"*

*Just hold up a minute, Jim. Yes, it's coming fine. The anchor points are secure and the snatch blocks are lined up perfect. I'm clear. Go ahead a little more."*

*"Excellent. I think we'll be on our way in a few minutes."*



# Safety Alert OF THE MONTH

PLEASE PASS THIS ON TO PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS IN BC'S FOREST INDUSTRY

## Resources:

[Winch Training Session](#) – Warn Industries winching session, practical tips and discussion.

[Guide to Winching Techniques](#) – Warn Industries provides this “how to” manual describing hazards, winching components and operation, equipment, and techniques for various situations.

[How to Reverse Winch](#) – but remember to use your gloves

[Oregon ATV Safety Course](#) – winching advice for ATVs

