

There have been quite a number of incidents reported in the press lately regarding serious injury and death whilst using recovery equipment. The following is an extract from a Coroner's Report in Burnie, Tasmania which highlights how dangerous a recovery can be.

I, (the Coroner), find that the deceased, aged 18 years, died as a result of a Traumatic Head Injury.
Circumstances Surrounding the Death:

... the Toyota ute became bogged on a side track. A Landcruiser manoeuvred into position with the intention of towing the ute free. The ute had sunk into the mud up to its axle and was firmly bogged. A snatch strap was attached to the towing assembly of the ute; the other end was connected to an attachment point on the front of the Landcruiser. Whilst the recovery equipment was attached a number of the occupants alighted from the vehicle. The deceased and others remained in the Landcruiser. There was only one occupant in the bogged ute. Lighting was non-existent and illumination was obtained by using torches and the vehicle's headlights to aid in connecting the snatch strap. Having connected the strap, the Landcruiser reversed away from the ute. During this process part of the towing assembly on the ute has broken free and smashed through the front windscreen of the Landcruiser striking the deceased before leaving the vehicle and landing some 90 metres behind it. The area has little or no mobile phone coverage. Team members unsuccessfully performed CPR. Both vehicles involved were examined by Transport Inspectors and were found to be unroadworthy. However, the defects identified in both vehicles would not have contributed to the death.

The towing assembly that was fitted to the ute was Inspected and found to be corroded.

The snatch strap was examined and showed fair wear and tear.

Tasmania Police found that:

* The snatch strap was attached to the tow ball. Snatch strap user's guidelines and current accredited 4WD training courses all advise that the snatch strap should never be attached to the towing ball in this type of recovery operation.

* During recovery operations using a snatch strap, all bystanders (other than the drivers' of the two vehicles involved in the recovery) should be at a safe distance (1.5 times the outstretched Recovery Strap length) to the side of the recovery operation and **NEVER** in the line of the recovery.

* There were no suspicious circumstances surrounding the death.

Comments & Recommendations:

After reviewing the evidence I am satisfied that the fatal injuries suffered by the deceased can be directly attributed to the failure of the towing assembly. The towing assembly had deteriorated over time affecting its structural strength. I also note that there was some evidence of poor quality welding on the ball coupling. It is also clear from the evidence before me that both vehicle owners were not aware of the dangers of attaching snatch straps to tow balls when completing recovery operations.

Having considered all the material before me I **recommend** that the motoring public, particularly those using 4WD vehicles be made aware and reminded of the dangers of using snatch straps in recovery operations.

It is important to correctly attach (following the manufacturers recommendations) the recovery strap to a motor vehicle. A standard tow ball or vehicle tie-down point is not designed for this purpose and may result in the strap or a vehicle component detaching from a motor vehicle and striking and seriously injuring or killing a person. Only attach the strap to a vehicle recovery point or device that is suitably rated for use with the strap.

Before I conclude this matter, I wish to convey my sincere condolences to the family of the deceased. This matter is now concluded. Tuesday, 28 September 2010 at Burnie in the state of Tasmania.

Donald John Jones - CORONER.