

Tow Truck Operator

Recover wrecks, clear crashes and rescue stranded drivers, often at 3am in the rain.

TYPICAL PAY

\$44,860

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$31k to \$80k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 1 year

after high school

DEMAND

Good

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Highways, crash scenes, impound lots, parking lots, repair shop yards

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma or an equivalency certificate** Grade 12
 Not always required, but it helps. What matters more is a clean driving record.
- 2 Get a clean driving record and turn 18** Now
 Insurance decides who gets hired in this industry. Tickets and at-fault crashes will keep you out.
- 3 Get hired and ride along** 2 to 6 weeks
 A few weeks with an experienced operator learning hookups, winching, controls and how to work safely on a live highway.
- 4 Get licensed where your state requires it** Weeks
 Several states license individual tow operators. Texas, for example, requires a tow operator license from its Department of Licensing and Regulation, with a criminal background check and a \$100 application fee.
- 5 Move up to heavy duty** 2 to 5 years
 Earn a commercial driver's license and recovery certification, then work bigger trucks and highway contracts.

Pros and cons

- + You can be earning within a month with no debt
- + Every call is a different problem to solve
- + People are genuinely glad to see you show up
- It is one of the most dangerous jobs on the road. Operators are struck and killed working the shoulder every year
- Nights, weekends and holidays are when you work
- You see crash scenes, and some of them stay with you

Good to know

Every state has a move over law

All 50 states require drivers to slow down and change lanes for a stopped tow truck with its lights on, exactly because operators keep getting hit. Enforcement is patchy, which is why experienced operators...

The rotation list is the whole business

Police departments keep a rotation of towing companies they call to crash scenes. Getting on that list means steady work and impound storage fees, so towing companies compete hard for it, and losing it...

Optional boosts

Recovery certification levels. A commercial driver's license. Air brake and tanker endorsements. Roadside repair skills.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Light Truck Drivers
 Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation: towing program
 Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation: apply for a tow operator license
 Training Provider Registry, the federal entry-level driver training system

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/tow-truck-operator>



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