

# Safely Cut the Cable to Save Lives

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Strengthening its partnership with emergency responders, WSDOT demonstrated how to dismantle one of its newest roadside safety features.

WSDOT has installed close to 70 miles of high tension cable guardrail on nine different highways in eight counties to help prevent crossover collisions. The new type of cable is pulled tight, using approximately 5,000 to 8,000 pounds of tension.

Cable guard rail offers momentous safety benefits from severe injuries and fatalities, which often result when a car crosses the median and collides with oncoming traffic.

We have already had a collision where a vehicle was entangled in the cables. Responders did not cut the cable in that collision, but it raised a good question. What is the procedure when there are life threatening injuries and we can't get to the victims because of the cables? Can the cables be safely cut to save lives? Fortunately, the answer is yes, but only as a last resort.

WSDOT recently conducted a cable cutting demonstration on US 101 west of Olympia. On hand were cable barrier contractors Trinity Industries and, Peterson Brothers, along with Thurston County emergency responder McLane Fire and Life Safety. We performed three cable cuts using different cutting tools under several different tension loads to simulate real world cable strikes by vehicles. The demonstration produced some recommendations:

- Cutting the cables is a last resort and is only appropriate in life-threatening situations. When high tension cable barriers are cut, close to 1,000 feet of barrier is placed out-of-service until it can be repaired. A missing section of guard rail is a potential risk to drivers.
  - If cutting the cable(s) is necessary, cut between two undamaged posts where the cables are parallel and not being subjected to multiple forces. Cut only the minimum number of cables necessary.
  - We recommend the cable be securely taped with duct tape or other tape on each side of the cut, to prevent unraveling
  - If the cables are tangled around a vehicle, lifting the cables out of the post may be appropriate. However, if you start to raise the cables and the post is lifted, stop and pull the post out of the way. Use extra caution and secure the post with a chain or restraining device as it may be under significant tension if cables are twisted around a vehicle.
  - Training is available from the Trinity Industries. To schedule training, contact Don Gripne at (360) 943-9559 or [gripned@earthlink.net](mailto:gripned@earthlink.net)
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