

# Guidance on Cable Median Barriers for Emergency Responders

Cable median barrier systems are used in many states and countries around the world **to reduce median cross-over crashes**, particularly on freeways. These types of crashes can be **many times more catastrophic** than other crash types. Cable median barrier systems are typically comprised of steel cables and steel posts that are either driven or “socketed” into the ground. The benefits?

- Various states have experienced significant **decreases in total median cross-over crashes and decreased fatalities** associated with this type of crash.
- The **cost per mile of installation can be as much as one-half to two-thirds lower** than other types of guardrail and concrete barriers.



*A common type of cable median barrier*

While the installation of cable median barriers is cost-effective and drastically improves safety on freeways, it does pose complex issues for emergency responders in two ways: safety for personnel extricating people and vehicles that have struck the barrier, and access for vehicles that need to cross the median for contra-flow response to incidents.

**VEHICLE REMOVAL** – To remove a vehicle from the cables, use these procedures (in order of priority):

- **Remove vehicle:** Vehicle should be pulled back in line with the centerline of the system.
- **Loosen turnbuckle:** Loosen cables at turnbuckles to reduce tension, and then remove vehicle at same angle and direction. Find the closest metal turnbuckle (located every 1,000 feet), and loosen turnbuckles with wrench to release tension.
- **Remove posts:** Loosen cables and remove posts to lower cable (socketed-style mounting only). This may be difficult in woven systems or icy conditions. A variety of posts exist.
- **Cut posts:** Use a suitable cutting tool. Do not cut posts flush with ground; leave a 2- to 3-inch flange.
- **Cut turnbuckle:** Personal protective equipment **must** be used for this option.
- **Cut or shear bolted cable connections at anchor:** This may render entire section of cable inoperable until reconnected by maintenance.
- **Cut cable:** Only use this method as a last resort if situation is a matter of life and death! Go to an area between two undamaged posts and wrap cable on either side of proposed cut with tape. Personnel cutting cable should be wearing turnout gear or hardhat, face/eye protection, Class 3 vest, welders’ gloves, chainsaw chaps, and steel-toed boots. Use a pipe wrench, friction saw, hydraulic cutter, and duct tape to cut. This option will render entire section of barrier inoperable until cable can be replaced.

*Report any cable median barrier work to your state EMA and your local DOT District. DOT maintenance personnel can provide guidance and on-site assistance; contact your local State Police or Law Enforcement Dispatch Center.*

**CROSS THE MEDIUM** – To cross the median, use these procedures (in order of priority):

- Use an **exit or existing median cross-over** to avoid interaction with cable.
  - Cross median at location where there is a **gap in cable run**.
  - **Loosen cable at turnbuckles and lower cable;** lay something across cables (steel, plywood, etc.) so that crossing vehicles do not become tangled.
  - **Loosen cable at the turnbuckles,** remove and lower posts; socketed-style only.
  - **Cut the cable** (follow instructions listed above).
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