

April 29, 2024 - LeeCARES Training Net: Tower Climbing

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Recently I was asked to help take down an antenna from a 40-foot tower and wanted to share a little about my experience with everyone.

As with any project, it got bigger once we got on site. What started off as one antenna removal from one tower turned into 4 antennas and 2 towers...two antennas on each tower. The most difficult was a 40-foot-long Yagi that weighed approximately 100lbs. To be perfectly honest, this one was scary.

There was a huge learning curve for me this time in my tower climbing journey. I quickly learned to rely on my safety harness to keep me safe as I worked. Learning to lean away from the safety of the tower and into the support of the harness is a bit scary at first. I also began to recognize the shortcomings of my set up and improvements I need to make.

Many challenges arose throughout the project. The U-bolts on the large Yagi didn't release as expected which was quite scary but the weight was supported by a truck which we used to lower the antenna with. It went very smoothly. Using two tag lines to guide the Yagi down also helped immensely. The last two antennas were lighter but became difficult due to fatigue and poor thinking and planning. At one point, I used a grinder to cut off difficult bolts to speed up the process.

The day before the job, I began to drink extra electrolytes to help keep me hydrated during work. I also tried to get more rest the night before. The physical demands of tower climbing are not great but extended periods of work and multiple ascents and descents can be demanding. Also, at the very top of the tower, things get a bit shaky and nerve wracking. The mental stress of hanging on can wear you out just as quickly as the physical strain. I learned to listen to my body to know when it's time to call it quits.

The challenge of taking down multiple antennas in one afternoon also led to thoughts of how to improve our methods. From rope management and placement to safety and communication, there are many important changes to be made in the future. An example would be to use our HTs to communicate. Above about 40 feet it becomes difficult to hear people on the ground...especially in windy conditions.

Tools are important and having the right tools in place is imperative. Thinking ahead and planning for the worst is the best practice. 40 feet up in the air is no place to realize you don't have what you need. Having a tool bucket on a pulley will assist you in getting tools, etc. when necessary...or you drop something important.

While most don't want to climb a tower of any height, you can still be of great help while staying on the ground. There is plenty to do in support of a climber and in the set up or breakdown of antennas and equipment. Keeping multiple ropes from tangling, watching for falling objects, making sure the climber has what they need, communicating effectively, and constantly monitoring the climber's condition...we can be stubborn and not take breaks when we should. Effective teamwork helps get the job done smoother, faster, and safer.

There are a few tower jobs coming up soon...mostly taking down towers. If any of you might be interested in helping...or just observing from below...let me know. It is important to see what all is involved to get that antenna you want into the right position...and we can always use an extra hand.