

# The Worst at Work

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Recently I read about the newest book in the *Worst-Case Scenario Survival* series. It deals with problem scenarios in the workplace. It tells you how to stay awake during meetings, unstick a candy bar from a vending machine, thwart a lunch thief, and the like. Hoo boy, that's nothing like *my* RE powered, remote workplace.

## Commuting

People who hear that I work from home always think that makes for a cushy job. I will tell you that it is a double-edged blade. Sure, I don't have the commute. This makes me wonder which would be worse—commuting over dirt roads, skinny country roads, mountain passes, and freeways, or in-town driving? Of course winter conditions always make mountain driving worse. That's the kind of commute I would have. But maybe the incredibly snarled traffic problems I see on the morning news would be worse. Yikes!

We live in a county that has twice as many cows as people. (This has been documented.) The whole county is open range, meaning that livestock can be found wandering anywhere, including in the roadway.

Yreka, our county seat, used to have only one stoplight. The arrival of Wal-Mart spawned another stoplight. Instead of turning it on immediately, the county covered the light with feed sacks for about four weeks. For the next step of integration, they turned the light to flashing yellow for another three weeks. Finally, they brought the stoplight up to speed and all three colors are working now. You have to ease country folk into change, you know.

Whenever I go to a bigger city (anything over 35,000 population), it seems there are stoplights on every corner. And you never see a herd of cows being driven down Main Street.

## Home Alone

People who travel to a workplace don't realize on a conscious level that when you work at home, you never leave home. Say you have a job away from home. You leave a clean house, and eight or nine or ten hours later, you return. Your house is still clean.

When I work at home, my house gets lived and worked in 24/7. To cope, we have what we call our "piling system." Any and all things tend to get piled, waiting for me to return

to that task because I've been called away to another task. This goes for both business and home-related tasks.

On weekends, I am still at work. I can't go home; I'm already there. The same piles are looking at me, waiting to be dealt with. Sure, I can get a few household chores done during the workweek between phone calls, shipping, and computing. But, I have to be ready to be interrupted at any moment. I usually wear an apron with a dishtowel attached. Then when one of the phones rings, I can dry my hands as I hurry to answer it. I can only vacuum after or before business hours because I can't hear the phone.

Basically, I cannot be more than three rings away from the phones or customers can become perturbed. When I am outside doing chores, I have a snap-on tool belt. It carries a wireless phone, notebook, pen, and a pair of garden clippers. The wireless gets lousy reception when I am all the way out at the chicken coop. That is not the worst of it though.

## Worst-Case Scenario #1

About a year ago, I was home alone sitting at my desk. I could hear the wind in the trees outside. Automatically, I glanced out the window toward the Whisper 1000 wind turbine spinning atop a 60 foot (18 m) tilt-up tower. I felt that zing of fear when I saw that a top guy cable had come loose, and the turbine was swaying and bending the tower more than I thought possible. Grabbing a pair of leather gloves, I ran out the door towards the pole. My brain kept saying that it was going to snap at any minute. How can it bend that far and not break?

I reached the base of the tower and found the loose end of the guy cable. It was an upper guy that vibration had twisted out of its turnbuckle. I grabbed it and ran to the anchor and turnbuckle. Immediately I realized that I was in no way strong enough to pull the cable and start its threaded bolt end back into the turnbuckle. The wind generator is a vital part of our RE system that keeps our home and office running. What would I do?

## Solution

I ran to the shop and scrambled around until I found a cable clamp lying on the vise bench. I kept looking around until I found a crescent wrench. Running back to the tower, I could see it still waving and flailing wildly in the wind. I

never stopped to think about how dangerous the situation could be. At the least, I should have thrown the stop switch on the turbine, and been more careful and methodical while all this was going on. But my life usually is a cautionary tale.

I grabbed the loose guy cable and brought it as close to the turnbuckle as I could. I slipped the U-bolt of the clamp over that cable and the bottom guy cable attached to the same anchor. I slid the saddle onto the U-bolt, threaded on the two nuts, and tightened them with the crescent wrench. That stopped the immediate threat of losing the wind turbine and tower. It still swayed back and forth, but not in such a large frightening arc.

I ran back to the house and called our neighbor, Stan. Breathlessly, I told him what happened and finished with a forced casual, "When you have a minute, could you come help me reattach the guy cable?"

Stan responded, "I'll be there in two minutes."

When Stan arrived, I returned to the tower and its slackened guy cable. A come-along would have been a really good tool to have for this job, but we didn't have one. I didn't think to clamp on a temporary safety cable so we wouldn't be holding the cable only by hand again. We loosened the cable clamp. Both wearing leather gloves, we pulled the cable over to the turnbuckle. Stan dug his feet in and held it there while I tried to start the cable bolt into the threads of the turnbuckle. After several tries, I ran to the shop and got a can of WD-40 while Stan held the cable. After spraying the cable bolt and turnbuckle, it took a few more tries to get the bolt started into the threads.

Once it held, I used the crescent wrench in the center hole of the turnbuckle to tighten the cable. I later found out that this is not the correct method to tighten a turnbuckle. It should be tightened at the ends, not the middle. At the time, it seemed like the easiest way for me to quickly get it safe enough for Stan to let go of the cable.

I threaded a small length of baling wire through the upper and lower guy turnbuckles at the anchor to prevent any reoccurrence. We checked the other turnbuckles for loosening, and applied preventative baling wire. Disaster was averted. Since I was at work, I had to go back to the house/office and check the phone message machine and return all of the calls that came while I was occupied with saving our wind turbine and tower.

When Bob-O returned home, he used some lengths of cable in figure eight patterns (instead of the baling wire) to secure all the turnbuckles—better late than never! This was the first (and only) tower that Bob-O ever made himself. In a classic case of the shoemaker's children going barefoot, he had not found the time to complete all the details of securing our tower—until this happened.

The tower is down again at the moment, but intentionally as we wait for some free time to replace the old turbine with a Whisper H80. We will be adding another full set of *well-secured* guy cables and anchors. Lesson learned.

## Worst-Case Scenario #2

A couple of years ago, Bob-O was on the phone with a customer when he glanced out the window. To his great

surprise, he saw a mountain lion taking down a deer on the road, across the creek, thirty feet away. He told the customer, "Something is happening outside. I have to go. I'll call you back."

I grabbed my 110 pound (50 kg) Airedale dog and locked her in the bedroom. (First disaster averted.) I looked out the window again. There was quite a struggle happening. Bob-O grabbed a gun, hoping to shoot into the air and stop the cougar's attack. He started in the direction of the struggle.

I was watching the writhing animals and realized that it was not a mountain lion killing a deer. It was two mountain lions fighting. There was snarling, growling, and flying fur. Then both cats were lying in a still tangle in the morning sun on the dirt road. As we watched, their tails started twitching. With several growls, they jumped up. One ran up the road and the other took off directly up the side hill.

## Solution

We had already performed the solution. We didn't go near the fighting cats, and I put my terrier in a safe place. Next I called the neighbors up the road and warned them to not let their small children play outside alone, if at all. When Bob-O went across the road to check the area where the battle took place, he found many tufts of golden fur and a bloody claw torn off and lying in the dirt. When he got back to the house, he called the client, apologized for the interruption, and continued their conversation.

I know these are not typical workplace scenarios. But I have found that when you live remotely with renewable energy, you need to be able to land on your feet, laughing. Expect anything; it just might happen. Now if I could only talk Bob-O into a candy bar vending machine for our office/dining room.

## Access

Kathleen Jarschke-Schultze is fermenting an unassuming little Pinot Bob-O from her micro-vineyard at Chateau Schultze in Northernmost California. c/o Home Power, PO Box 520, Ashland, OR 97520 •

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