



# Eastern-in-the-News



## TRACTEL PARTNERSHIP BRINGS CLIMB ASSIST DEVICE TO EASTERN'S TRAINING PROGRAM

**Moorefield — Sept. 17** — Thanks to a new industry-and-education partnership, students in a local wind energy technician training program will get a step up and find their load a little lighter. “Specifically, it's about a 90-pound lift for every step,” said Grover Duling, program consultant at Eastern WV Community and Technical College, referring to a climb assist device now installed at the college’s climbing tower in Petersburg.

“As part of their Wind Energy Turbine Technology (WETT) program, Eastern teaches proper climbing techniques, ladder safety and rescue,” noted Bill McBrayer, an executive with the Tractel Group, manufacturers of the climb assist. “Climbing the internal ladder to reach the turbine is one of the most physically challenging parts of the wind technician’s job, and many accidents happen when workers become fatigued.”

McBrayer, Tractel’s Director of Sales for North America, met Duling at the American Wind Energy Association’s (AWEA) annual conference last June in Atlanta, Georgia. “They were vendors there, and they had a ladder set up,” Duling noted, “and alongside it a rubber-coated, centered, nylon rope with a pulley on each end. At the bottom, a motor pulls the rope through the pulleys and makes a complete circle, a continuous motion.”

The device, known as the Tractelift, gives traction relief with a pulling force up to 90 pounds, and reduces worker fatigue while climbing and descending.

“It’s basically a motorized belt,” added Ward Malcolm, Eastern’s Dean of Career, Technical and Workforce Education. “When you latch on to the rope with a grip latch, you engage the device, and it tugs on you, so you feel lighter and can climb with less effort, or descend with less effort.”

The technician puts on a climbing safety harness and hooks a latch from the harness onto the rope like a Chinese handcuff, Duling explained. “The motor is already running, and the technician engages it by stepping up the ladder. As the technician starts to climb, the assist device senses motion upwards and will lift 90 pounds off the technician’s legs, and pulls him or her up the ladder.

“As you stop for a rest or break, the device stops, and it allows you to continue that way up to the top at your own pace. Coming down, it happens the same way, and you kind of float down the ladder, so you don’t have weight on your knees—that's what it eases first.”

Tractel’s McBrayer pointed out that “having a ladder climbing power-assist that eliminates 90 lbs of the climber weight will greatly enhance the workers’ overall longevity in the workforce and improve safety and productivity.”

At the AWEA convention this summer, Duling met McBrayer, told him about Eastern’s WETT program, and invited him to visit the college’s Technology Training Center in Petersburg, and to bring along a demonstration climb assist. In short order, Tractel agreed to partner with Eastern, and in late August dispatched a four-man team from all across the country to install the device at Eastern’s climbing tower.

“It’s a demonstration/training model for any industry representatives that might have interest in seeing it and training their employees,” Duling said. “Tractel is very supportive of education, and they were most kind and gracious, sharing information and expertise. Eastern’s location at the hub of a booming regional wind farm industry makes the college the ideal place for this kind of partnership.”



**Standing by the base of the climbing tower at Eastern WV Community and Technical College’s Technology Training Center in Petersburg, the installation team for a new industry-and-education partnership celebrates the inauguration of a motorized climbing assist device.**

**From Left, the Installation Team: Grover Duling, Eastern’s program consultant; Dallas Jones, Tractel’s Northeast US Regional Manager; Dan Bierlein, Tractel’s Southeastern US Regional Manager; Bill McBrayer: Tractel’s Director of Sales for North America; Charles “Skip” Landes, Eastern’s new Advanced Technology Instructor; and Rick Herrick, Tractel’s Midwest US Regional Manager.**

Industry representatives can visit the Petersburg training site, observe the climb assist at work, and even arrange for their employees to get training at the college, Duling noted. “Because a wind farm operator would be more likely to purchase the device once their people know how to use it.”

The Tractel device offers the economic advantage of portability, Duling pointed out. “You can take the motor, the expensive part with the drive motors and clutch gears, pull the pin on it, move it to the next tower, and hook it up there, so you don’t have to buy the expensive part for every tower.” The device costs between three and four thousand dollars, depending on the model, he said.

For more information about Eastern’s financial aid opportunities, programs of study, workforce training and community education, call 304-434-8000; or toll free: 877-982-2322; or check the College’s website: “[www.easternwv.edu](http://www.easternwv.edu)”.

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