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Tech Tips

Don't 'Jack-Around' with your Tent Jacks

As we travel around the country helping clients improve their tent installation techniques, we often see poor and even dangerous equipment and methods used when jacking frame tents. The most common issues are described below.

Jack Design: A good tent jack should have the following characteristics: First, the base should have at least two contact points on the ground on the side facing the tent frame. This is because most jacks lean into the frame under load, lifting the back leg off the ground. Two legs on the ground (vs. just one with some brands) provide the stability needed to prevent the tent from tipping sideways. For jacks with a flat plate as a base, the front edge serves the same purpose as two legs. (Note that some jack brands also allow you to install the mast backwards on the base, creating the dangerous situation described above.)

Second, the winch should be of good quality and preferably have a clutch instead of a toggle lever for up and down travel. The toggle lever is usually the first part to break on a tent jack as it's thrown into a truck. Lastly, we have a strong preference for using rated webbing instead of cable. Cables tend to fray with use, and can quickly slice a hand. In either case, know that these are items that should be inspected frequently and replaced when worn.

POSITIONING TENT JACKS

Two legs of the jack base should always be under the tent. Never use a tent jack with a single front leg as they are unsafe!

Place your jacks every 15'. The exact location & spacing will depend on the weight of the frame (2" tube is lighter than Supertube / Maxi tube), hip or gable configuration, and the quality & lifting capacity of your tent jack.

Secure the jack strap CLOSE to the connectors. Straps should be within 2' – 3' of a connector with Full Strength frames, or right next to the connector with 2" tube frames. Never connect a jack strap to the middle of an eave tube as you risk bending the tube.

Distance from Eave Tube: We often see jacks placed too close or too far from the frame. This either causes the frame to hit the jack or the jack to lean at a dangerous angle, with crews standing on the back leg trying to 'counter balance.'

When picking up a frame, it will move slightly toward the jack and then farther away as it's lifted higher. For this reason, we recommend placing the jack mast approximately 6" away from the outside of the frame eave prior to lifting.

When lowering the tent, the frame will move quickly toward the jack, then slightly away just before it hits the ground.
We recommend placing the jack mast about 18" – 24" away from the frame when lowering.
The frame should come to rest about 6" from the mast when it's on the ground.

Call us with any questions, and safe tenting!

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