



**SUBTECH VISION TECHNOLOGY**  
**DESIGN & MANUFACTURING INC.**  
*For Over 30 Years*



## What to do when the camera's stuck

Hello Karen,  
Welcome to the **Subtech Vision Technology**  
**April Newsletter**

This month, we tackle a frustrating—but all too common—challenge in the field: retrieving a stuck sewer camera. Whether it's wedged in a collapsed pipe or tangled in debris, knowing how to safely and effectively recover your equipment can save time, money, and a major headache.



**CAMERA EXTRACTION: Unsticking Sewer Scopes  
Without Losing Your Gear**

A stuck sewer camera can derail your entire day. Whether you're navigating root-clogged clay pipes or dealing with misaligned joints, knowing how to interpret what your cable is telling you—and how to respond—can mean the difference between a quick recovery and a costly teardown.

This month, we're giving you a straight-up, real-world breakdown: how pros read cable resistance, the exact cable movements that work, and field-proven scenarios you can learn from.

**Built for Battle: Your Camera's Safety Net:** Our scopes are reinforced with aircraft-grade steel cable, designed to withstand serious tension when a head gets stuck. It's your last line of defense before things go sideways.

⚠ **Tough doesn't mean invincible:** Use control before force. Get your technique right before you muscle it.

**Decoding the Cable: What You're Feeling—And How to Respond** Reading the feel of the cable is how seasoned techs diagnose what's happening underground. This is learned through repetition, but once you know the signals, you can make the right move and hopefully get your camera back without causing damage.

**SHARP, HARD STOP Feels like:** Instant dead-stop with zero give  
**Cause:** Offset joint, a 90° fitting, or partial collapse

**What to do:**

Pull out about 2 feet of slack at the reel

With light backward tension on the cable, use a short back-and-forth twisting motion—like turning a doorknob quickly

Keep the motion tight and fast—this helps “walk” the camera head backward and shift it off the obstruction

You're not spinning the whole reel—you're using your fingers and wrists to jiggle the camera head loose laterally. This simulates nudging it off a lip or corner underground.

“If you feel it move or shift, stop. Realign your feed angle, then try again.”

Changing angle from above ground—left/right or up/down—can be all it takes to free the head from an offset or ridge.

**GRADUAL, STICKY RESISTANCE Feels like:** Dragging through honey—slow, gummy pull  
**Cause:** Roots, grease, soap buildup, or sediment

**What to do:**

Start a smooth, steady clockwise rotation, like turning a screwdriver with your whole hand

Every 3–5 seconds, pull back 1–2 inches, then pause

Let the cable rest briefly—this allows internal pressure in the blockage to relax

The combo of rotation and incremental pullback helps break surface tension and slowly peel the head through the blockage. Think of it like working a stuck rag out of a drain—gentle tug, twist, pause.

“Rotate... pull... pause. It’s rhythm, not force.”

**GRITTY, UNEVEN RESISTANCE Feels like:** Scratchy, stop-go tension with bumps  
**Cause:** Rust flakes, debris, cracked pipe edges

**What to do:**

Apply gentle backward pull—just enough to keep tension on the line

With your dominant hand, do a tight shaking motion—like trying to free a stuck drill bit

Keep it small and fast. You’re “buzzing” the camera head to help it vibrate through rough edges

This is useful in old cast iron or corroded steel where the head gets momentarily hung up on jagged surfaces. You’re using motion—not pressure—to sneak it through.

“Old pipe? Go slow. Fragile walls crack if you torque too hard.”

### **Real-World Scenarios From the Field**

#### **Root-Bound Rescue**

**Setup:** 1950s home, 4" clay pipe, fine root intrusion. Camera stuck ~40ft in.

**Technique:** The cable hit gradual resistance that worsened over several feet until the head stopped moving altogether. Camera feed confirmed a web of fine roots around the spring behind the head.

The tech eased off about 1 foot of cable to relieve pressure

Held steady clockwise rotation with full-hand control for about 10 seconds

Alternated between that rotation and gentle 1–2 inch pulls, with pauses

After several cycles, the camera broke loose and was reeled back slowly

This recovery worked because the tech avoided forcing it. Gentle motion and consistency did the trick.

“I could feel it loosen just a little... then I knew I had it.”

#### **Offset Challenge**

**Setup:** 6" PVC main, misaligned joint causing abrupt stop at ~35 ft.

**Technique:** Camera feed showed the head tilted awkwardly against the joint. Instead of forcing it:

Tech stepped 2 feet left to change the cable feed angle

With light backward tension, applied side-to-side shaking motion (like rattling a paint roller)

Once the live feed image leveled out, the head slipped past the joint

“It wasn’t stuck—just needed a better approach angle.”

### **The Precision Cut**

**Setup:** 4" cast iron under slab, confirmed collapsed section near 28 ft.

**Technique:** The camera stopped cold and lost video. The tech:

Used the locator to pinpoint the exact head location and depth

Marked the slab, scored it, and broke open a small section

Used a snap cutter to remove 2 feet of pipe

Recovered the head safely, lodged in a collapsed segment surrounded by debris

No force was applied. The job was resolved without damage because the tech followed the process step-by-step.

“Without the locator, we’d have torn up a 10-foot section of slab and still been guessing.”

### **Prevention = Less Extraction**

Use skids for older, root-heavy lines

Scope the first 10–15 feet slowly to feel resistance before a full push

Mark depth every 10–15 ft to track head position. Take a minute now. Save hours later.

### **Know When to Stop**

Camera hasn’t moved in 5+ minutes

Feed shows worsening angle

You’re hearing pops or stress in pipe

Stop. Reassess. Use the locator. Don’t guess and wreck your rig.

**Need Service?** We offer fast camera repairs and support. Reach out if you’re stuck—we’ll help you get it back on track.

Call our tech line @ 209-269-3251

Book service @ 209-531-9716



### Our Commitment to You

- **Rapid Repairs:** Our repair center boasts an average turnaround time of just 2 days, often completing repairs so swiftly that your equipment spends more time in transit than in our facility.
- **Responsive Technical Support:** Our dedicated technical support team is readily available to assist you, ensuring swift and effective resolutions to any challenges you may encounter.

### **Don't Let a Stuck Camera Slow You Down**

If your camera gets stuck and damaged, we can repair it — as long as you can get it back. Repairs are more affordable, with an average 2-day turnaround at our in-house service center.

Need a replacement? We've got you covered — but it's a costlier fix.

Avoid the hassle altogether with smart use and the right setup.

[Visit Our Website](#) for system specs and tips to keep your gear moving.

Sincerely,  
The Subtech Vision Technology Team

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2905 Railroad Ave Suite A, Ceres, CA 95307

**(209)-531-9716**

[WWW.SUBTECHMFG.COM](http://WWW.SUBTECHMFG.COM)



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Subtech Manufacturing Inc. | 2905 Railroad Ave Ste A | Ceres, CA 95307 US

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