

Avoid Backing Accidents

We drive millions of miles each year and most of these miles are driven going forward. Although the majority of accidents occur while vehicles are going forward, about 30 percent of all accidents occur when vehicles are moving in reverse. Based on the high frequency of these accidents and the fact that most backing accidents are preventable, emphasis must be placed on safe backing procedures.

Accidents that occur when a vehicle is going in reverse are costly to companies. While the most frequent of claims involve property damage, bodily injury to individuals does occur. Bodily injury is a major factor when considering why the total cost of backing accidents is so high.

There are many hazards that have to be considered when backing a vehicle:

- Inadequate clearance on both sides and top of the vehicle
- Objects directly to the rear of the vehicle when it begins to back
- Objects that move into the pathway of the backing vehicle
- Blind spots created by the vehicle
- Inattentive ground guides responsible for giving directions to the driver

What steps can be taken to prevent backing accidents? The most important one is to make a U-turn and make drivers aware of the potential for backing accidents, and continually stress the following procedures:

- Don't back up unless absolutely necessary. Proper planning of routes and proper positioning of the vehicle can reduce the amount of backing that is necessary
- When possible, use ground guides to assist you in backing. Prior to any movement, the driver and ground guide should review the signals that will be used to back the vehicle. Always know exactly where the vehicle will be placed. Throughout the movement, the driver maintains full responsibility for the actions of the vehicle
- Use all available aids to keep you aware of your surroundings. These include mirrors on both sides of the vehicle, rearview mirrors, reflections of the vehicle in windows, and shadows thrown by the vehicle
- When no helper is available, get out and walk around the entire vehicle. This "circle of safety" should be used to observe anything that could come in contact with the vehicle. Be sure to observe areas above ground level such as clearance from the top and sides of the vehicle
- Back into driveways instead of backing out into traffic. This practice will give the driver a better view of children or other hazards that might be in the area. It also puts the driver in the position to operate with full visibility when entering traffic again
- Make sure the proper mirrors are installed and they are properly adjusted before moving the vehicle
- Check to see that backup lights function properly. In addition to providing illumination in darkness, they act as a warning to others that the vehicle is moving in reverse
- Backup alarms are required on construction equipment, but they can also be installed on any other type of vehicle. These alarms provide an audible warning when vehicles back up and should be considered if a lot of backing is done or large vehicles are involved
- Always back up slowly. When backing the vehicle, drivers should always expect something to get in their pathway. Slow backing will enable quicker stops
- Roll down a window and turn off the radio so warnings can be heard. Driving backwards can be done safely, but caution must be the watchword

Before backing up: Walk Around ▪ Look in All Directions ▪ Go Slow