

## Backing safely

Backing collisions account for a large percentage of the losses trucking companies experience. Since it is the driver's responsibility to ensure the path behind the vehicle is clear, this type of loss is usually considered preventable. Generally speaking, a preventable loss is one where the driver failed to do everything he or she could reasonably do to prevent it.

There are many compelling reasons to avoid backing accidents. Backing losses can, and often do, cause extensive property damage, serious injury, and sometimes death. They can also tarnish the safety record of the driver involved. In addition, backing accidents may result in out-of-pocket expenses, higher insurance rates, and business disruption.

There are several ways to reduce the risk of a backing collision. The best way is to avoid backing whenever possible. Though this is not possible in all situations, it is possible in many situations. As an example, how many times have you heard the story of the driver who missed a turn and backed up in the roadway to make the turn instead of finding a safe place to turn or go around? The difference between this dangerous maneuver and the driver backing to a loading dock is simple: traffic, congestion, and the fact that other drivers are not prepared for a large vehicle to back up on the roadway. In other situations, backing around corners and out of driveways or alleys almost always increases the risk of a collision. These maneuvers should be avoided whenever possible.

There are several important safety considerations to be mindful of when preparing to back up. Is the space behind and to the sides of the vehicle free of obstacles? Is there sufficient overhead clearance? Are clearance signs posted and are they legible and accurate? If there is snow on the ground or if the road has been paved recently, the posted clearance could be wrong.

When backing is unavoidable, safety professionals recommend several simple procedures to help reduce the risk of being involved in a backing accident.

- Get out and walk **completely** around the vehicle. Make a mental note of anything that could create a hazard. This walk around should include a survey of the following areas: **Behind the vehicle** to identify any fixed objects and nearby vehicles and pedestrians that may move behind your vehicle while you are backing **Both sides of the vehicle** to survey the dock area for fixed objects and parked vehicles **Overhead clearance**, including location and height of wires, signs, and awnings **The road surface**, including bumps, potholes, slopes, and other irregularities that could affect the height and angle of your vehicle  
Once you have completed the walk around your vehicle, begin backing immediately before the situation changes.
- Back from the driver's side, not the blind (passenger) side. Backing from the driver's side increases visibility and reduces the guesswork.
- All backing movements should be done with extreme caution and movements should be very slow. This will allow for better control while backing. It will also allow you to stop quicker if an obstacle suddenly appears.
- Continue checking all sides of the vehicle as you back up. If you have already determined that the overhead clearance is sufficient, you should concentrate on the sides and the rear of the vehicle. Some drivers believe being able to back up using only the mirrors is the mark of a professional. This is not the case. The driver who gets out of the vehicle to size up the situation is more likely to be considered the professional.
- In the past, asking a guide to help may have been considered a weakness. Now many drivers seek the benefit from having some assistance. In some situations a guide can be helpful, especially in areas where there is limited space to maneuver or if traffic needs to be stopped. However, it is important that the individual understands what you are trying to do and how they can help you back safely. The guide should

always stand in an area that is visible to you. *Never let the guide out of your sight!* Before backing with a guide, agree on specific signals that will be used. This will help avoid confusion when you are backing up. Over the past few years, many vehicle owners have added back-up warning devices. These include beepers, buzzers, horns, and flashing lights. Though these warning devices can be helpful, they are not foolproof. Efforts should still be made to visually verify that the space behind your vehicle is free of obstacles.

Another important step in collision-free backing is mirror adjustment. Poorly adjusted mirrors can limit your range of view to the sides and rear. Mirrors should be adjusted properly and cleaned regularly.

By following these simple steps, the risk of being involved in a backing accident can be reduced. True professional drivers understand the importance of walking around their vehicles, getting out to take another look, and moving slowly. Remember, backing accidents are preventable. By following safe backing procedures, this incident type is among the easiest to avoid.

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