

Watch out When you Back up

Drivers spend less than 1% of their time behind the wheel backing up, yet backing accounts for approximately 25% of all vehicle accidents. Most backing accidents result in property damage, but over 15,000 injuries and 500 deaths, many of which are children, are caused by backing collisions. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), over 90% of backing accidents are caused by a driver using improper backing techniques or being unaware of an obstacle.

PLAN TO BE SAFE

The best way to prevent a backing accident is to avoid having to back up. Park so that you can pull forward instead of backing up. In parking lots, park further away from a building's entrance where you are less likely to encounter pedestrians or other vehicles. Also, park defensively by choosing parking spaces that are easy to exit and don't crowd neighboring vehicles—Park in the center of the space to give your vehicle more clearance.

PROPER BACKING TECHNIQUES

Before backing up a vehicle, especially trucks or other large vehicles, walk around to check for hazards or obstacles. Mirrors cannot show all of the potential dangers. A medium-size truck can have a blind spot of up to 16 feet in front and 160 feet behind the vehicle. During the walk-around, check the clearance, including the space above, for potential hazards such as low-hanging tree limbs, wires, or awnings. Know your vehicle's height.

When possible, use a spotter to help you back up. Have the spotter use agreed-upon hand signals to prevent miscommunication. Also, don't have the spotter walking backward while directing the driver as this can lead to tripping or falling. If using a spotter is not an option, the walk around the vehicle carefully checking for dangers and then immediately get back in the vehicle and begin backing up; this will lessen the odds of site conditions, such as pedestrians, changing.

Even if you are backing up in a familiar location, remember that site conditions can change. A safety check is always a good idea and takes less time than filling out an accident report. Backing up a vehicle is not like driving forward and should be practiced repeatedly so that the driver knows how the vehicle handles in reverse and how the steering wheel needs to be turned. Technology such as a backup alarm can help warn pedestrians and other vehicles about the potential danger, and backup cameras can help eliminate blind spots and provide added safety.



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR COUNTIES

Vehicle accidents are one of the most significant areas of loss for the CTSI Casualty and Property Pools. Counties should ensure that drivers are trained in proper backing techniques and are given a safe place to practice backing up in county vehicles. Remember that time spent driving forward does not prepare a driver for driving in reverse. For more information on backing up safely, including information on fleet safety programs, contact CTSI Loss Control at 303 861 0507.

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