

Backing Accident Prevention

What driving activity occupies less than 1% of a driver's time behind the wheel, but regularly, year after year, produces approximately 25% of all vehicle-related accidents? **Backing up.**

Based on the high frequency of backing accidents, and the fact that these accidents are often preventable, it is essential to be aware of safe backing procedures. While claims from backing accidents most often involve property damage, bodily injury to individuals can occur as well. Backing collisions cause over 500 deaths and 15,000 injuries per year, many of which involve children.

A National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) study determined that over 90% of backing accidents can be attributed to one of the two following causes:

- The driver was unaware of the obstacle.
- The driver used improper backing techniques.

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

- Inadequate clearance on both the sides and the top of your vehicle
- Objects located directly to the rear of your vehicle
- Objects that move into the pathway of your vehicle
- Blind spots created by your vehicle
- Inattentive ground guides (i.e., individuals outside of your car assisting in the backing process) responsible for giving you directions

The most important step to prevent backing accidents is to be aware of the potential for these types of collisions.

Keep in mind the following procedures:

- **Don't back up unless it is absolutely necessary.** Proper planning of routes and proper positioning of your vehicle can reduce the amount of backing.
- **Never take any situation for granted.** Even though you may have parked or backed into a location many times, always evaluate the location to determine if clearances have changed or if new obstacles are present.
- **When possible, use helpers or guides to assist you in backing.** Prior to any movement, you and your guide should review the hand signals that will be used to back the vehicle. As the driver, you maintain full responsibility for the movement of 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 your vehicle. Be sure to also observe areas above ground level such as clearance from the top and sides of your vehicle.
- **Use all available aids to keep you aware of your surroundings.** These include your side mirrors, your rearview mirrors, reflections of your vehicle in windows, and shadows thrown by your vehicle. Make sure your mirrors are properly adjusted before moving your vehicle.
- **Know your mirror blind spots.** Conduct a walk-around inspection of your vehicle to check these blind spots.
- **Perform all backing maneuvers slowly** and know what's going on around you at all times.
- **Back into driveways or alleys if it is possible and allowed** instead of backing into traffic. This puts you in the position to operate with full visibility when entering traffic again. If you need to back out of an alley or driveway, ask someone to be your guide and signal when it is safe to back into traffic.
- **Install rear-vision camera systems** on your vehicle to assist in eliminating or reducing rear blind spots.

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