



Vehicle Backing Safety: What you should know!



\$10,000 damage caused when plow truck backed into third party

According to the National Safety Council, one out of four vehicle accidents can be blamed on poor backing techniques. Statistics from our own municipal risk pool bear this out, with 157 crashes reported that involved backing of a vehicle or mobile equipment, with resulting loss or damage of **\$335,494** between 7/1/2018 and 7/1/2019. ***That means vehicles, equipment and property are damaged or people were being hurt more than three times a week!***

What departments are involved? Public Works, Police, and Fire/Rescue accounted for 87% of incidents and \$289,535 in damage. The remainder were scattered among various departments. *Does the season matter?* The four months of December, January, February, and March accounted for 65 incidents, or 41% of the claims.

Simple Tips to Avoid Backing Accidents:

1. *Avoid backing:* When possible, drive and park so you do not have to back up.
2. *Check visibility:* are your windows clean, clear of snow or ice, defrosted and clear of obstructions?
3. *Check mirrors and blind spots:* Are mirrors properly adjusted? Remember, mirrors do not eliminate all blind spots! In a medium-sized truck, blind spots can extend up to 16 feet in front and 160 feet behind a vehicle. Add on plow gear and other equipment, and blind spots increase.
4. *Check the situation:* Is the area in back of the vehicle clear? Is there vehicle or pedestrian traffic in the area? Are small children in the vicinity? If possible, get out and check all sides of the vehicle for potholes, muddy areas or other potential hazards.
5. *Check what's overhead:* Vehicles with a tall profile such as dump trucks or ladder trucks may strike overhead wires, tree limbs or other obstructions.
6. *Back-up alarms:* Are they in place and working?
7. *Eliminate distraction:* Shut off the radio so your focus is solely on the backing operation (unless using radio communication with a spotter-see below).
8. *Check equipment:* If a backup camera is installed, is it working properly? Is the lens clean?
9. *Check lights:* Was a vehicle pre-check done prior to use? Are backup lights working and not covered with road grime? Are exterior warning lights operating?



Spotters: A spotter may be used, especially when backing a large vehicle or backing into a tight space or crowded bay. *All the steps listed above should be taken even if a spotter is used.*

Additional steps if a spotter is used:



Establish a **clear** means of communication between the driver and the spotter.

Agree on a hand signal the spotter will use for **STOP!** Even if verbal or radio communication is being used.

Roll down the window and turn down radios so verbal shouts or warnings can be heard.

The spotter must be kept in visual sight at **all times**, either directly by **looking out the window or by using mirrors**. Using the backup camera to keep the spotter in sight is NOT safe practice. If you lose sight of the spotter, **STOP!**

When in doubt-**STOP!** Stop backing, get out of the vehicle and confer with your spotter to make sure everyone is on the same page.

When Backing: Lean forward, look over your left shoulder and check mirrors every 3 - 5 seconds.

Remember: driving safely is up to you as the Operator of the vehicle.

Know your equipment: What is different about this equipment than your own personal vehicle? Has anything been added to the vehicle like a trailer, sanders, or other attached equipment?

Practice, Practice, Practice: Vehicle training and practice will help the operator know the limitations of visibility from the vehicle, including blind spots. Practicing backing in an open clear area will help the operator develop a “feel” for the vehicle’s turning, backing and handling characteristics.

Follow your department’s driving procedures: What are the expectations of you as the operator of the vehicle? No texting or talking on cell phones.

Resources: The Loss Control division of MMA Risk Management Services offers several Vehicle Fleet training courses to members of our programs. Please contact your Loss Control Consultant or Risk Management Services. Members may also access online training on the MMA website by clicking on the Risk Management Services and Online Safety Training links. The Light Truck Safety Series - Backing Safety course provides more detail on safe backing practices.

Ref: Vehicle Backing Safety Factsheet, the Texas department of Insurance and the National Safety Council