

BACKING A VEHICLE SAFELY

According to the National Safety Council, 25 percent of vehicle accidents can be blamed on poor backing techniques. Backing accidents cause approximately 500 deaths and 15,000 injuries per year. The use of safe vehicle backing tips by all drivers – including employees and employers – can help prevent accidents.

1. *Get to know a vehicle's blind spots.* Drivers need to remember that mirrors can never give the whole picture while backing, so it is important for every driver to know his or her vehicle's blind spots. In a medium sized truck, blind spots can extend up to 16 feet in front and 160 feet behind a vehicle.
2. *Think in advance.* Drivers should not put themselves into unnecessary backing situations.
3. *Park defensively.* Drivers should choose easy-to-exit parking spaces that do not crowd neighboring vehicles. Vehicles should always be parked in the center of the parking space.
4. *When parking in an alley.* In certain circumstances, a driver should back into an alley (if local ordinances permit) so that when leaving the vehicle can pull forward into the street; for example, if an alley doesn't permit driving all the way through or room to turn around.
5. *Do a walk-around.* Walking around a vehicle gives a driver a first-hand view of the backing area and any limitations. The driver can check for children, soft or muddy areas, potholes, tire hazards, and other dangers.
6. *Know the clearances.* Vehicles with a higher profile – such as vans or most trucks – need greater clearances than passenger cars. When driving high profile vehicles, the driver should always check for obstructions, low-hanging trees and wires, and any other potential clearance-related problems.
7. *Every backing situation is new and different.* Obstacles can appear anytime in any backing situation, even from a driver's own home. Drivers must always be watchful for any change or obstacles.
8. *Use a spotter.* Smart drivers will often use another person to help them when backing. The driver and spotter should use hand signals instead of verbal signals and make sure they understand each other. The spotter should not walk backwards while giving instructions.
9. *Drivers "spot" for themselves.* After finishing a walk-around to spot any obstacles to backing, the driver needs to return to the vehicle and start backing within a few

seconds. This allows very little time for people and /or obstacles to change behind the vehicle.

10. Rear-vision camera systems. Installation of rear-vision camera systems in vehicles eliminates rear blind spots. Investing in a rear-vision camera system for vehicles can put drivers in full visual control of the rear of a car or truck.

11. Practice, practice, practice. No amount of forward-driving experience can prepare a driver to back a truck or car. All drivers need to practice in safe surroundings until they become familiar with the way the vehicle backs up compared to the direction the steering wheel is turned.

Source: Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation, "Vehicle Backing Safety Fact Sheet."