

# VEHICLE BACKING CHALLENGES

ALLIANZ RISK CONSULTING



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Driving a car under normal circumstances presents numerous challenges to any driver. Backing a vehicle for any reason poses a unique set of tasks that can test even the most experienced operator. The National Safety Council estimates that 25% of all vehicle accidents may be attributed to poor backing techniques. This risk bulletin will review some actions that may reduce the possibility of an accident while backing a vehicle.

One method for reducing backing exposures is to take a preemptive approach towards vehicle safety. This can be done in several ways. First, it is essential to understand your vehicle's blind spots. A medium sized truck may have blind spots that extend 16 feet in front and 160 feet behind the vehicle. With that in mind, drivers need to recognize that mirrors will not be able to provide the whole scenario while backing.

Operators should think proactively and not "drive" themselves into a situation where backing is necessary. Parking defensively where possible is another method for reducing the need to back a vehicle up. Choosing parking spots with an easy exit and not crowding neighboring vehicles are two examples of defensive parking.

It is understood that each instance where a driver must use backing techniques is new and unique. Drivers that have regular routes may visit a facility several times throughout a day or week. Traffic and customer conditions may create a backing situation that was not there during a previous visit. In these situations, the driver should perform a walk-around inspection of the vehicle and the backing area to identify any possible hazards. This may include:

- Other parked vehicles
- Children
- Potholes/tire hazards
- Overhead wires
- Low hanging trees
- Trash cans/dumpsters

Where possible, it is advised that the driver use a spotter to assist when performing the backing maneuver. Driver and spotter should both have an understanding of the movements to be performed and the steps they will take to be successful. The spotter may be able to temporarily control traffic and provide guidance as necessary. A series of hand signals understood by both driver and spotter may be most effective in communicating. If the driver must back up without a spotter, he/she should perform the maneuver as quickly as possible after performing the walk-around inspection of the area. This will reduce the possibility of conditions changing behind the vehicle while backing.

Drivers may encounter unique circumstances during their travels, such as parking in an alley or on a dead end. If conditions do not allow for driving through, or there is no room to turn around, the driver should back into the alley if possible. This will let the driver pull forward into traffic upon exiting.

It is essential that companies develop and support training programs for all drivers. The training should teach and review backing techniques, use of spotters, hand signals and dangers to avoid among other topics. Points of emphasis during the training may include the following:

- Back only when necessary
- Back the shortest distance possible
- Back in a straight line if possible
- Back as slowly as possible
- Back sight side first
- Back blind side as a last resort
- Check mirrors every 3-5 seconds
- Check all clearances (front, rear, right/left side, ground, overhead)

Drivers must be able to practice these maneuvers in safe surroundings to become more comfortable when presented with these challenges while on the road.

Companies can take additional steps as well. Technology advancements have helped to minimize some exposures. Installing front and rear facing cameras have helped to eliminate blind spots around the vehicle. Back up alarms may warn pedestrians or other drivers in the immediate area of the actions taking place.

Accidents and injuries resulting from backing are nearly always preventable. Taking a proactive approach towards backing safety and employee training is essential to reducing the possibility of backing related incidents. If you would like further assistance, please contact your Allianz Risk Consultant.

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