



Safety Bulletin

Backing/Operating In Reverse

Among the many challenges that truck drivers face each day is backing the truck. The number of backing related accidents is astonishingly high based on the limited amount of time a driver spends moving in reverse. Most backing incidents are low speed and involve little property or truck damage, but these little dings deserve our attention! Even low speed accidents have the potential to result in large bodily injury claims when other drivers or pedestrians are involved. The driver must understand the risks and challenges associated with backing the truck. These challenges include limited visibility, narrow & limited spaces to maneuver, and congestion. The driver must take a few seconds to properly analyze the situation and determine the best way to accomplish the task. This may include getting out of the truck and inspecting the area about to be traveled. It is best to look at each of the major challenges and determine what steps to take to help reduce the associated risks.

Limited Visibility – Limited visibility is created by several factors. This includes not being able to directly see where the vehicle is moving and having to rely on the mirrors. As all professional drivers know, the mirrors do not provide the whole picture. There are blind spots that the mirrors do not pick up. Also, the mirrors do not allow the driver to see what is directly behind the vehicle. The blind spot is increased if the driver is forced to make a sharp turn while backing up.

Narrow or Limited Space to Maneuver - The driver must be prepared for areas where their backing skills will be challenged by the lack of space. Many customers' facilities will have minimum space dedicated for deliveries and service. Even newer facilities may have limited space due to parking of vehicles and trailer storage.

Congestion – With the construction of larger and more modern facilities, the driver may find the delivery or pick up points to be very busy. This may involve other vehicles or facility employees. The driver must be prepared for these potential risks.

Steps that the driver can take to help control these risks include:

- Eliminate backing if there is another way to approach the site.
- Get out of the vehicle and walk the route that you will be backing through. This will allow you to get a visual image of where you are going to travel and allow you to pick up key points to watch for to help track your progress. With really difficult backing situations, the driver might need to get on the ground more than once to check the terrain.
- The driver must figure out how to get the truck into the best position possible with the space available to help minimize blind spots. This requires pulling the vehicle forward until it allows a straight backing path into the assigned dock door or parking spot.
- The driver should back with the blind spot on the driver side. By having the best vision on the drivers' side of the vehicle, the driver is able to better control the process.
- Get assistance from another driver or person from the site to help guide you. Clear communication must be established before you start to back. The driver must be able to see the "spotter" to ensure the guide is not injured. Remember, even with a guide on the ground, the driver is still responsible for any incident.
- The driver may also consider approaching the backing task from a different angle or approach. This may require the driver to reverse the approach by going around the block and backing from a direction that will allow the backing to be performed without taking sharp turns.

- The driver may have to wait until another vehicle has cleared the area or ask that a vehicle parked in the area be moved to facilitate the backing process.
- The driver should avoid backing into traffic stream or over sidewalks without a spotter to direct them and stop others if necessary.
- The driver should sound their air horn as they begin backing to provide a warning to others in the area and to draw others' attention.
- The driver must take their time and not feel rushed while performing the backing task. Rushing while backing often leads to damage to the driver's assigned vehicle, another vehicle in the area, or to the customer's facilities.

Backing the truck is a critical task that a driver must be able to perform safely. The driver must take time, analyze the space available, and then execute the task in a safe and controlled manner. The driver should not be afraid to ask for assistance when needed, but must remember that they are still in control and responsible for the vehicle, trailer, and cargo.

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For more information, contact our topic expert:

Christopher P. O'Neill
Phone: 610-968-2571
Email: Christopher.ONeill@xlgroup.com

XL Insurance
505 Eagleview Blvd, Suite 100
PO Box 636
Exton, PA 19341-0636 USA

www.xlinsurance.com/environmental