Driving Safely in Reverse



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WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Don't go backward if you can go forward. That's good advice about life—and about driving.

Operating a vehicle in reverse puts you at a disadvantage. It's difficult to see all the obstacles in your way. And because the driver's seating and the controls are designed primarily for forward travel, it's hard to respond quickly enough to changing traffic situations. According to the National Safety Council, one in four motor vehicle accidents can be attributed to poor backing techniques.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

Loading docks, signs, overhanging roofs, cargo and other vehicles are often damaged in backing accidents. Worse, pedestrians may be injured or killed.

EXAMPLE

A truck driver was backing up when he struck a worker on the running board of another truck, causing the worker to fall off. After the worker fell, the truck rolled over him and killed him. The victim was wearing a red and yellow safety vest and was gesturing to the truck driver to move over. The truck driver was found guilty of operating equipment in a manner that endangered another worker and operating a vehicle without the assistance of a signaler. He was jailed for 20 days for health and safety violations.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Don't back up unless you have to. For example, avoid backing up by parking so you can leave going forward. If you miss your destination, don't back up.

Instead, go around the block and try it again.

If backing up is unavoidable, here are some ways you can reduce the risks of injury to property and bystanders:

- Before backing a vehicle, make a circle check by walking around the vehicle looking for possible obstructions.
- Use mirrors to see as you back, not an open door. Adjust mirrors before backing.
- Use a backup alarm and flashing lights, if you have them, but don’t rely on others to hear and properly respond to these.
- If a co-worker is available, ask that person to act as a guide. But remember, that even with a guide, backing up is the responsibility of the driver who is in control of the truck.
- Have the guide stand to one side and be clearly visible to you.
- The guide should have a clear and continuous view of the path the vehicle will follow.
- Be sure the guide is not between the vehicle and an obstruction such as a wall, where he or she could be crushed.
- Have the guide use proper hand signals, since voices are easily drowned out by the noise of traffic.
- Back slowly and cautiously from the time the vehicle is put in motion until it stops.
- Watch for and be prepared for any change in conditions during the movement.
- If you become unsure of where you are as you back up, stop immediately and check your surroundings.
- If you have a choice in the direction you will be backing, try to back in from the driver’s side because it will be easier to see where you are going.
- When backing a tractor and trailer unit, the steering wheel must be turned in a direction opposite to the way you want the rear of the trailer to move.
- Foot traffic should be kept to a minimum in an area where vehicles are backing. In congested areas, use barricades and foot traffic corridors to control pedestrian traffic.
- As a pedestrian, be constantly alert for moving vehicles and machinery. Be aware the driver may not be able to see you until it’s too late.

FINAL WORD

Forward is definitely better than backward when it comes to driving. Avoid situations where you have to back-in. If it’s unavoidable, enlist the help of a guide, move slowly and carefully, and stay aware of blind areas around your vehicle.