**Preventing Backing Accidents**

According to the National Safety Council, one out of four vehicle accidents can be blamed on poor backing techniques.  Backing accidents are the cause of 500 deaths annually and 15,000 injuries per year.  A study conducted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration also found that over 90% of backing accidents can be attributed to one of two causes:

1. The driver was unaware of the obstacle.

2. The driver used improper backing techniques.

Collisions that occur when backing a vehicle are often the result of drivers failing to do one or more of the following actions:

* Failure to check outside the vehicle by conducting a walk-around of the vehicle and its surrounding environment
* Failure to look before backing the vehicle
* Failure to check the vehicle’s blind spot
* Failure to frequently check the vehicle’s mirrors
* Backing the vehicle at an unsafe speed

Drivers who are involved in accidents as a result of unsafe backing practices often state that they were in a hurry, running late or the obstacle was not there when they parked the vehicle. There are hundreds of reasons an individual will try to justify why an accident happened, however backing without looking is typically at the root cause of accidents that involve a vehicle driving in reverse.

Backing the vehicle without looking is a frequent occurrence. Examples of these situations include:

* Drivers who get into their vehicles and start backing without really paying attention while they are backing
* Drivers who look behind the vehicle before backing, then do not follow through with the maneuver right away because they are distracted. When they are ready to continue the maneuver, they do not recheck the environment behind the vehicle before backing.
* Drivers who back their vehicle without first checking their mirrors or blind spots by turning their heads and assuring that there is no one walking behind or at the side of the vehicle.

Improper backing techniques are another contributor to backing accidents. Examples include:

* Backing the vehicle the wrong way, such as backing to the right when it needs to go to the left.
* Backing out and not following the marked lines on the pavement where the vehicle is parked.
* Backing farther than necessary.

There are many simple techniques that drivers can put into place to assist in preventing vehicle backing accidents. First, conduct a walk-around of the vehicle or park it where you have to walk toward the passenger side of the vehicle.

Taking these actions forces you to walk behind the vehicle. This is important because when you do this, you are looking at the passenger side and the back of the vehicle as you walk toward it upon returning. You can now see if there are any obstructions present behind the vehicle.

If someone is with you or nearby, ask them to spot you as you back the vehicle. A spotter will watch the area behind the vehicle to prevent accidentally backing over objects or people in the path of your travel. A spotter should not be located directly behind the vehicle. They should be in an area where they can be seen in the driver’s side mirrors. If a spotter is not available, physically check the area behind the vehicle one or more times yourself.

Be aware of your surroundings by being attentive and listening. Roll down the window, turn off the radio and listen for the honk of a horn, the sound of another vehicle or the presence of a child/anyone else who may be in the vicinity of the vehicle. This is critical to safely maneuvering the vehicle.

Once the vehicle walk-around is completed and you have established an awareness of your surroundings, double check the mirrors, the vehicle’s blind spot areas and the back-up camera screen if your vehicle is equipped with this device.

Checking the mirrors and back-up screen is important, but do not rely solely on these devices for safety. No matter how much adjusting you do to the mirrors, all vehicles have blind spot areas. A blind spot is an area around the vehicle that you cannot see using the mirrors. Turn your head and look over both shoulders to check blind spot areas. Keep in mind that larger vehicles may have larger blind spots. Once the blind spot areas have been checked and determined clear, continuously check all of the vehicle’s mirrors as you back up. In some instances, it may be necessary to turn and look out of the rear window while backing the vehicle. Make sure items are not placed in the vehicle that may block view of the rearview mirror.

You are now ready to begin backing the vehicle. Put it in reverse and release the brake slowly. Give the horn a small toot to draw attention to your vehicle. Back up slowly while continuously looking and listening for signs of trouble. Back the vehicle only as far as you need to go, keeping in mind that most backing collisions occur during the last foot of backing.

Another preventive technique is to position the vehicle so that you do not have to back it up. However, if backing cannot be avoided, it is always better to back in upon arrival than to back out when departing.

Another helpful technique for backing a vehicle is to back to the left. This is helpful because your field of vision to the left is greater. It also allows you to look out of the window instead of over the back seat while maneuvering the vehicle. Avoid backing to the right as much as possible.

Unexpected obstacles can occur at any time so always expect the unexpected when backing your vehicle. Anticipate that someone or something will come up behind your vehicle while you are backing it. This is a defensive driving technique that reminds drivers to maneuver slowly and with caution no matter what the situation.

As a defensive driver, it is important to be aware of the situations that could result in backing collisions. To avoid these situations, be sure to practice the following techniques:

* Check the Circle of Safety by performing a walk-around of the vehicle.
* Be attentive and listen for others who may be near the vehicle before backing it up.
* Check your mirrors and blind spot areas frequently while backing the vehicle.
* Use a spotter if you feel uncomfortable with the clearance available to the vehicle.
* Always back the vehicle slowly.
* Expect the unexpected while backing the vehicle and be prepared to stop.