

Backing Up Safely

Some members of the animal kingdom are able to see what's going on behind them without turning their heads. The human animal can't do that.

Therefore, we face an extra challenge when we have to drive in reverse. Most backing-up accidents occur at speeds under five miles per hour. But they still result in significant damage to vehicles and other property, may even cause serious injury, and are sure to wreck the driver's safety record. Reviewing and following safe backing practices can reduce such accidents. I have a list of 12. How many do you know and practice?

[Note: This is one of the places where you may wish to call on the trainees to talk about how to ensure the driver's own safety and that of others while moving in reverse. They may miss some of these, but may think of some others. Wording needn't match exactly, but be sure the important points are made.]

1. Plan and drive your routes to avoid backing wherever possible. This may mean a few extra steps to get from the vehicle to the worksite, but walking is good for you.
2. If you pass the place you are looking for, beware of drifting back. Your slow progress when looking for the right address might be the reason that the car behind you pulled up so close. If you have a clear view of what is behind, check the mirror, turn around, then put the vehicle in reverse. If there is a remote possibility of a blind spot, get out and look before you have an accident.
3. When obliged to back up, make absolutely sure there is nothing behind, and then back up immediately. Do not look and then wait for a while before backing up, because conditions could change.
4. Use all mirrors when backing—right, left, rear, and the overhead too if there is one. You can't see any of the mirrors if you are hanging out of the driver's door to see what is behind you. Besides, you could damage the door if it strikes an object.
5. If it is necessary to back up some distance, travel slowly and stop part way, then get out and check your safe progress.
6. If you are driving a big truck, and there is help available to assist you in backing, use it. Have the guide stand to the side and give a hand/arm signal because a vocal signal may not be heard. Never let the guide get directly behind the truck. If that does happen, stop until the guide is alongside. Remember that safe backing up is still your responsibility as the driver, even if you have a guide.
7. Park where you will not have to back up to get out of a parking spot. Always pull away from a parking place in forward gear, if possible.
8. If you miss your turn at an intersection, don't back around a corner to change direction. Instead, drive on and around the block. The extra few minutes might save someone else's car from a dent.
9. If you have to park in a driveway, back in if possible, so that when leaving, you can drive forward rather than backing into the street.
10. When backing over a sidewalk and into a street, stop at the sidewalk and make sure there are no small children playing close by. Stop again at the curb to make a last check on traffic before backing into the street.
11. Remember that, when backing, a turn of the steering wheel turns the front of the vehicle in the opposite direction. While backing, the front wheels should be in line with the back wheels until objects on each side have cleared the front bumper.
12. Before backing into an unfamiliar area, get out and look for stakes, holes, and sharp objects. These commonsense precautions came from assorted drivers with good safety records after driving many miles—both forward and backward.