

# Think Safety When Backing

By Judy Kerry  
State Compensation Insurance Fund

Studies show that the most common type of vehicle accident is a backing accident, and many of these incidents occur in construction operations. Due to limited vision out of a vehicle's back windows or around large vehicles and equipment bodies, drivers may not see other vehicles, obstacles or even coworkers when they're driving backward. Whether driving vehicles on the construction site or transporting construction materials on public roads, drivers and site workers who know and practice proper backing procedures can reduce the chance of accidents and injuries.

Before you back your vehicle, do a vehicle walk-around to check underneath and all around it for obstructions and potentially dangerous situations. Inspect the doors and tailgates for proper closing and the safe and secure storage of materials within the vehicle. Insure that there's plenty of clearance around the vehicle to back up safely.

Some employers use a "cone policy" that requires you to place orange safety cones at either end of the vehicle whenever you park. Walking around the vehicle to pick up the cones before you leave gives you a chance to inspect the vehicle and your surroundings. The cones also provide good visibility and a warning to other drivers that you're working nearby.

While backing is the most common *type* of vehicle accident, speed is the most common *cause* of accidents. When you're backing, make sure that you do so slowly. Before you move, if possible, place your arm along the seat backs and turn your head to the left and right to look directly out the sides and back of the vehicle. As the next step, or if you cannot look directly out of the vehicle, use your side and rear-view mirror to look in all directions to the rear of the vehicle. Backup cameras and sensors are good tools that can help you keep watch around your vehicle.

If your vehicle is equipped with a backup alarm and/or is required to use the alarm, make sure that it's working properly. If you don't have a backup alarm but feel that it's necessary to notify others that you're backing, you can put on your flashers and honk the horn as you back. However, make sure that the area behind you is clear of obstacles, pedestrians, and other vehicles before you move. If you see a person or a vehicle approaching, judge the traveling speed and distance before backing.

At times, spotters can assist you with a backing maneuver by sharing the responsibility for watching the rear of the vehicle. If possible, don't ask a spotter to exit the vehicle. If you must use a spotter outside the vehicle, make sure that you can see each other in the side-view mirror at all times. Do not proceed with backing if you lose sight of the spotter. Two-way radios and/or hand signals can be used to help communicate.

If you're acting as a spotter or work near backing vehicles, listen for the backup alarms and watch vehicle movement. Never assume that the driver sees you and knows where you're going. Never walk alongside or ride a backing vehicle. As an added safety precaution, wear highly visible clothing when working around backing vehicles.