

RISK COMMUNIQUÉ

Vehicle Backing Practices

Accidents as a result of backing an emergency vehicle happen very frequently. Often these incidents result in minor damages, but sometimes the results are severe and even fatal. Backing an emergency vehicle can be hazardous because of blind spots that interfere with the driver's ability to see hazards. These hazards can include other vehicles, fixed objects such as trees and poles, and sometimes pedestrians, children or other emergency workers.

To reduce the risk of accident and injury, emergency service organizations may want to develop standard operating and training guidelines. VFIS suggests that you follow these best practices, which include, but are not limited to:

Administrative Controls

- Have a written backing policy and see that all drivers receive a copy.
- Include in this policy a section for all personnel who will act as spotters.
- Recommend that spotters always be involved when drivers are backing emergency vehicles.
- Provide for specific backing evolutions included in all driver training (*examples may be obtained in the VFIS Emergency Vehicle Driver Training program*).
- Adopt standardized hand signals and verbal commands to be used by both drivers and spotters (for *examples, see the VFIS Emergency Vehicle Driver Training program*).
- Always include spotters during driver training evolutions.

Spotter Responsibilities

- Conduct a "circle of safety" and survey the backing area and all other sides of the vehicle, checking for hazards.
- Communicate any observed hazards to the driver before proceeding to back unit, being sure to also check overhead clearance.
- Obtain either visual or verbal acknowledgement with the driver that you are acting as his/her spotter.
- Place yourself eight to ten feet to the rear of the unit in view of the driver's mirror.
- Establish visual and verbal contact with the driver and continue eye-to-eye contact in the mirror at all times.
- Be mindful of hazards that come into play as you are moving, for both your and the vehicle's safety.
- Be familiar with hand signals before allowing backing maneuvers to begin.
- Stop the driver if any hazards are observed or if you are uncertain of the direction in which the driver is maneuvering.

This is a sample guideline furnished to you by VFIS. Your organization should review this guideline and make the necessary modifications to meet your organization's needs. The intent of this guideline is to assist you in reducing exposure to the risk of injury, harm, or damage to personnel, property, and the general public. For additional information on this topic, contact your VFIS Risk Control Representative at (800) 233-1957.

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Driver Responsibilities

- Consider whether there is a way to avoid backing when parking the vehicle.
- Don't be in a hurry when backing.
- Roll the driver's window down completely.
- Confirm who your spotter is and confirm any hazards he or she has observed.
- Make visual and verbal contact with the spotter and maintain this contact. IF YOU CANNOT SEE OR HEAR THE SPOTTER, STOP!
- Develop a thorough knowledge of spotter hand signals.
- Give a two-blast warning on the horn just prior to backing.
- Use a spotter if at all possible. If there is no spotter available:
 - Reconsider backing up. Is it really necessary?
 - Make a reasonable attempt to get someone to act as a spotter.
 - If a spotter cannot be obtained, get out of the unit and walk around it, completing a "circle of safety" and surveying the backing area. Before proceeding to back the unit, be sure to also check overhead clearance.
 - Give a final warning of two horn blasts just prior to backing.

By understanding the importance of safe vehicle backing measures and adopting these or similar best practices into your organization's driving procedures, you will reduce the risk of damage and/or injury.