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VEHICLE BACKING

Backing accidents are among the most common vehicle accidents. Although these accidents usually result in minor damage to vehicles, striking a pedestrian is never minor. And there are cases where walls and even buildings have collapsed.

Road vehicles are designed for forward movement; many are very poorly designed for backing. Visibility to the rear is poor. Mirrors do not give a complete view. Visibility may be obstructed by the load in the vehicle, passengers, etc. (Of course, backup cameras and assistive technology that brakes the vehicle if an obstacle is detected are valuable safety assets.)

If the position of the driver is awkward, it may cut off from view all the activity on one side of the vehicle.

All this means that when you are backing, you must take extra care to make sure the area behind is clear.

Start by walking around your vehicle to get the complete picture of how you need to maneuver the vehicle.

If you look out the left window to see what's behind you, you may miss what's to your right. Keep checking.

In a parking lot, back into the space if possible, so you can pull forward when you leave. But if you must back out, remember there may be pedestrians not only in the driving aisle of the lot, but also in the narrow space between your vehicle and those next to you, so both spaces need to be checked. Start backing up slowly and pick up speed very gradually. Never back quickly.

Do not back around corners. It is safer to drive around the block.

Get help to direct you if you can, but be sure you agree on what the signals mean. In a tight space, back part way, then get out and check again before finishing the move.

Plan. If there is a way to avoid backing, take it.