

DRIVING: BACKING INTO DOCKS



INTRODUCTION

One of the trickiest parts of driving a commercial motor vehicle (CMV) is backing the vehicle into the loading dock area. If not done properly, backing into a dock could result in property or vehicle damage or injuries to the loading crew. Sometimes both property damage and injury can occur at the same time. By following the guidelines presented in this lesson, employees can help minimize the chances of property damage or injuries occurring when backing into the docking area.

CHALLENGES OF BACKING INTO DOCKS

When attempting to back into a loading dock, professional drivers may encounter some of the following challenges:

- Tight and narrow spaces
- Obstructions or obstacles
- Dark areas
- Watching for dock crew members
- Blind spots
- Railroad tracks



SURVEYING THE AREA

Before attempting to back into a dock, drivers should get out of their vehicle and do the following:

- Use three points of contact when exiting the truck.
- Inspect the docking area for people, other trucks, obstacles or obstructions, lighting conditions, and anything that could act as, or get in the way of, your blind spot.
- Inform people who are working in the area that you are going to be backing up in the next few minutes and to avoid walking in known blind spots.
- Ask if obstacles can be removed from the loading area (wooden pallets, parked forklifts, etc.)
- If working in colder climates, drivers should check to see if there is ice or snow in the docking area.

Employees should use extreme caution when backing over ice or snow patches.



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BACKING INTO THE DOCK

When backing into a dock, drivers should do the following:

- Eliminate distractions in the cab.
- Roll down both windows to help with hearing.
- Maintain communication with loading staff.
- Obey all red and green lights that are used on the dock (if applicable).
- Listen for any alarms and instructions.
- Alert others that you are backing up by sounding your horn.
- Remain calm. Do NOT worry about the time that it takes to back into a dock.
- Back up slowly. Do NOT rush backing.
- Use a spotter when it is safe to do so, preferably a spotter who has experience with trailers. Do NOT rely solely on a spotter. It is recommended that drivers get out of their trucks and check on the trailer themselves.
- Watch both sides of your trailer when backing up.
- Use all mirrors on your truck. If a dock has mirrors located on or around the dock, use those mirrors in addition to your truck mirrors to help track the trailer's progress and pedestrians.
- If you find that you are having trouble with your mirrors, lean out your window and take a look around. Leaning out of the window should only be done when it is safe to do so.
- Make small adjustments.
- Get out and check adjustments as needed.
- When possible, employees should avoid sharp turns.
- Pull out and straighten out as many times as necessary.

PULLING AWAY FROM THE DOCK

When drivers are ready to leave, they should do the following:

- Get out and walk around the vehicle to ensure that no one is in or around the trailer. If you are unsure about the location of someone, ask others in the area. Ensure that all loaders are off of the trailer or dock leveler before pulling away from the dock.
- Wait for the light to turn green before pulling away (if applicable).
- Sound the horn to ensure that everyone is aware that you are going to be moving.
- Watch the sides of the trailer as you pull out.
- Keep an eye on both pedestrian and vehicle traffic.
- Pull away slowly.

CONCLUSION

Backing trailers into docking areas is one of the trickiest parts of being a CMV driver. There are a variety of challenges that a driver could be exposed to when backing into a dock. Drivers should maintain communications with everyone in the docking area and back slowly into the dock. Backing into a dock is not a race and doing things slowly and safely will help minimize accidents that occur in docking areas.

