

Backing up vehicles safely

From 2005 to 2010, dump trucks, semi-trailers, trucks, forklifts, garbage trucks and pickup trucks were involved in nearly 200 workplace backover deaths, according to OSHA. Additionally, the Bureau of Labor Statistics recently began collecting specific information on these fatalities and determined that 79 backover deaths occurred on the job in 2011.

A backover incident occurs when a backing vehicle hits a worker who is standing, walking or kneeling behind the vehicle.

The following are examples, recommended by OSHA, of back-over prevention methods:

Spotters: Using a spotter has been proven to keep workers safe. However, spotters also are in danger of being hit by a backing vehicle. Several steps can be taken to help keep workers safe.

- Before work begins, drivers and spotters should agree on hand signals.
- Ensure spotters always have visual contact with the driver when a vehicle is in motion.
- Ensure drivers know to stop immediately if they lose sight of a spotter.
- Do not give additional duties to spotters.
- Do not allow spotters to use mobile devices or personal headphones when working.
- Provide high-visibility clothing for spotters, especially when working at night.

Cameras: OSHA states that most vehicles can accommodate a camera to provide drivers with a view to the rear and other blind spots. When equipping vehicles with cameras, it is important to consider the environment operators work in. Some construction sites and mines may require more rugged cameras, and vehicles such as dump trucks may need two or more cameras to monitor blind spots.

Proximity detection systems: These systems use radar and ultrasonic technology to bounce a signal off an object. The system then alerts the vehicle operator with a visual or audio warning that an object is in the way.

Internal traffic control plan: Create a plan to coordinate the flow of moving equipment, workers and vehicles to help minimize the number of times workers and vehicles cross paths. According to OSHA, these plans can significantly reduce and even eliminate the need for vehicles to back up on a jobsite.