



Motor Vehicle Backing Policy

Purpose: Adopt a proactive backing procedure policy.

MIIA recommends the adoption of a proactive backing procedure policy for all municipalities. This policy aims to reduce vehicle collisions, particularly those involving city or town-owned vehicles. Departments should develop their own backing policies based on the specific requirements within their operation and the types of vehicles/apparatus they use.

To ensure its effectiveness:

- Provide a copy of the policy to all employees.
- Ensure all employees receive initial and refresher training.
- Maintain a signed acknowledgment of the policy from each employee.

Below are specific recommendations tailored to Police, Fire, and DPW departments.

Please note: we're providing the following general information to bear in mind when developing a comprehensive list of responsibilities to include in your Standard Operating Procedures Backing Policy manual.

Police Department

Adopt a policy requiring all police vehicles be backed in while at headquarters. When out on patrol, officers should always back into parking spots or position their vehicles to avoid collisions. This reduces the risk of accidents during emergency calls by keeping the officer's focus forward.

Loss Lesson from David Bastien, MIIA EVOC instructor (while working as a police officer in the City of Warwick, RI)

An officer was heading into work walking through the police headquarters parking lot. Another officer, who'd left his tour of duty a few minutes earlier, backed his personal vehicle out of the parking spot and struck the officer resulting in a broken leg injury. The next day, a general order was issued that all personnel with vehicles parked on City property would be required to back their vehicles into a parking spot. The G.O. was to ensure that someone exiting a parking spot going forward would have a much clearer view than backing up. With vehicles being manufactured with backup cameras and sonar, it's reduced the risk of this occurring, however, in an emergency situation with adrenaline rushing, requiring police vehicles to be backed into a parking space further reduces the risk of a collision.

Fire Department

Similar to police vehicles, the safest approach is to avoid backing a vehicle up whenever possible. You may want to review the NFPA 1500 standards for guidance on backing procedures.

When two people are in the vehicle, the passenger should assist the driver in backing by acting as a spotter. If three people are present, two should serve as spotters, with one responsible for communicating with the driver.

- Ensure the driver and spotter agree on hand signals before backing; alternately the spotter may use a portable radio for communicating with the driver.
- The spotter should maintain visual contact with the driver; if the driver loses sight of the spotter, they should immediately stop the vehicle.
- Spotters should always wear high-visibility clothing and at night use flashlights.

If only one person is in the vehicle, use all available tools to back up safely.

- Use backup cameras (aftermarket cameras can be purchased, if needed).
- If a spotter is unavailable, conduct a 360-degree walk-around of the vehicle to survey the area.
- Check for overhead obstructions.
- Open windows for maximum communication and visibility.

Painted lines and markers can further assist drivers in aligning their vehicles correctly.

DPW

DPW drivers should follow similar backing policies with appropriate guidelines and training and use a spotter whenever possible. In smaller departments where a spotter isn't feasible:

- The driver should exit the vehicle before backing.
- Conduct a 360-degree inspection around the vehicle.
- Use mirrors to ensure proper distances when pulling into a garage.
- Add painted lines in the garage bay as a guide.
- Install aftermarket cameras, which may be eligible for funding under the MIIA Risk Management Grant Program.

Proximity Detection Systems:

Radar and ultrasonic technology can provide visual and audible warnings to alert drivers to obstacles. In situations with poor lighting or weather, drivers should stop and check their surroundings before backing.

Given that one-third of all backing collisions involve Police and Fire Departments, MIIA strongly recommends implementing and enforcing a backup policy from a risk management perspective.

Note: If in a construction zone and detail officers/flaggers are present; dual ear buds may be worn by detail/flaggers to ensure they are aware of movement, can hear the backup alarm and know where the vehicle is going.

Disclaimer: The material contained herein is intended for general informational purposes only. It is not intended as legal advice and should not be construed as such. Any inquiries concerning Massachusetts law should be directed to a city solicitor, town counsel or other licensed attorney.

