**Q&A Winter 2012**

**Backing Accidents**

Q: I have been analyzing my preventable accidents and have found that backing represented more than 55% of his accidents, an increase from previous years. What are some of the leading best practices other fleets have used to cut down on the number of backing accidents.

A: Here are some of the responses after polling members of the NPTC Safety Committee:

1. The cone program definitely works.  I have one client (convenience store delivery) in particular where it has been implemented with success.  However, training and control will need to be vigilant to keep the drivers doing it.  Also lost cones can be a common problem—they leave them.  Cars also like to run them over if they are too far from the vehicle. Cameras on the rear of the trailer absolutely stops backing accidents though.  It is a cheap investment for a huge payback.
2. As a team operation, when possible a driver uses their co-driver to spot for them when backing and/or maneuvering in tight areas. If the co-driver is in the sleeper berth and the driver does not wish to get them up to spot for them then they have been instructed to get out and look (G.O.A.L.) even if it takes several times. Drivers that chose not to practice this know if contact is made with an object during a maneuver, whether backing or in tight areas, it will be viewed as preventable.
3. Personally, I think it is demeaning to ask a professional trailer driver to put a cone out and then have him get out and pick it up. Cones aren't the way to go........it will just embarrass the driver with no perceptible reduction in backing accidents.
4. While the (G.O.A.L) portion is good, the placement of one cone could cause target fixation. The drivers get used to backing to the cone, forgetting all about "all around" awareness. Example, they get out and look, placing a cone on the driver’s side. They fixate on this cone while backing to it and fail to watch the other corners.
5. Our operation has about 19% backing accidents. We however discuss all accidents per quarter and year at each driver meeting. We review the driver’s accident report and discuss with the group. You could almost say that each accident is under an accident review committee in our meetings. If we find that we are having a rash of the same type of accidents, we will then do a deep dive training into that driving category. We have found this approach as well as the above approach works well for us. Nothing is a secret, and drivers names are not used.
6. My company also continues to struggle with high %’s of incidents being backing.  In May 2009, we instituted a Cone Policy which requires all vehicles to be equipped with three traffic cones.  Drivers have been given the expectation anytime they back to a fixed object they are required to use two cones with one leaning on top of the other for the purpose of spotting the stopping point.  In addition, drivers are expected to Get Out And Look each time they prepare to enter a delivery area and use cones to mark hazards in the path.  At the time the policy was implemented all of our locations conducted a safety meeting to review the policy and discuss the expectation for the use of cones.

Since May 2009, our numbers and percentage of backing incidents have remained flat with no improvement.  From my personal perspective, we relied more on the fact we had a “policy” and failed to go out to the customer sites to observe driver behavior in compliance with the policy.  We also were very limited in our approach to a “policy” on using cones and failed to focus on conducting good risk assessments, GOAL, good backing skills and all of the factors that come into play when a driver backs.

In early 2011, we put together a comprehensive review on backing incidents and in addition to reinforcing the use of cones we reinforced all aspects of backing.  In addition to focusing on overall driver behavior we put actions in place to make sure we have a safe delivery area when we sign new business and also work to improve existing sites known to be a challenge for drivers.  Finally, even though we were very specific with requirements to use cones anytime a driver backs to a fixed object we have failed to follow through on effective consequences when a driver is observed not using cones.  With the policy being limited to cones we often rationalized a driver used cones but simply had an incident anyway and therefore overtime the effectiveness of having a policy was limited.

With hindsight always being 20/20 my recommendation would be if a Cone Policy is going to be implemented, it needs to be in conjunction with an overall backing strategy and also include GOAL and dynamic risk assessments.  From my perspective cones are a tool that can help a driver but unless used properly and in conjunction with the other aspects of backing they will not improve safety alone.  Drivers also must believe using cones is important and managers must go out and conduct observations.

1. We have experienced a similar trend but more pronounced. We are measuring any parking lot accidents as the base instead of just backing. We feel that low-speed maneuvering accidents is the proper category. One caution – one of the reasons that the percentage of parking lot accidents has increased in our operation has been the reduction of on road accidents. For the past three years, our focus has been to reduce the higher cost, more litigious accidents and we have not spent much energy on the remainder of our accidents until this year. Our 2011 training approach is to use the Smith System with focus on parking lots. We chose this method because it addresses our issues and reinforces the proper on-road behavior as well. We did discuss using cones but cannot enforce the procedure. It was the opinion of the majority that we do not have enough opportunity to audit the drivers and went with training instead.
2. We had a “Cone” process for backing.  We assigned every driver two cones and the expectation was that they get out and set up cones prior to backing.  This process is valuable when the drivers use it, but it is very difficult to manage and ensure drivers use the cones when they are on the road.
3. See the following graph of our backing events since 2008.  In 2007, we implemented a backing cone program that requires the driver to GOAL and place a cone 5 feet from the building or fixed object that is in the path of final travel. The intent of the policy is to perform this procedure at the point when the driver has already arrived and has the vehicle stopped in preparation for its backing movement before the final delivery position.

Overall, the policy is proving to be a good program.  Some of the backing accidents that are included in the graph would not have been prevented with the use of the backing cone, i.e., backing in from a street and hitting a car or fixed object.  Our delivery locations are not designed for tractor-trailer access.  I believe this program has helped avoid the “unknown” or “near-miss” type events.  Also, the enforcement of this policy is supported by random, on-site observations that are performed by our driver leasing company.



1. I have used numerous general awareness training methods including, DVD’s, quizzes, discussions etc. One of the small things that went over well was when I did the quiz I gave each driver an ink pen with the acronym GOAL on one side then spelled out of the other side **G**et **O**ut **A**nd **L**ook. It’s not much but each time they used that pen they were reminded. The biggest impact we’ve had on all accidents that are minor is if they bump something and say it is only $200 to fix we take this amount out of their Safety Bonus. We allow this once per occurrence (after this they lose it all) but when they get a reduced check they squawk and talk to the other drivers. But everyone understands this is the procedure
2. We implemented the G.O.A.L. program utilizing cones several years ago and realized an immediate reduction in our backing accidents.  We frequently perform drop and hooks so we carry two cones on each tractor and two cones on each trailer.  Our drivers are expected to get out of their truck and walk the backing zone EVERY time they are to back.  One cone is to mark their destination and the extra cones are to mark any secondary hazards.  If they lose sight of any of the cones while backing they are to get out and reposition them accordingly.