

Apparatus/Vehicle Backing

906.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Best Practice

The purpose of this policy is to help members avoid the dangers inherent to vehicle backing operations and reduce the high incidence of firefighter injuries and fatalities.

906.1.1 DEFINITIONS

Best Practice

Definitions related to this policy include:

Apparatus - Any department vehicle that is designed and equipped to support firefighting and rescue operations, including those equipped with an aerial ladder, elevating platform or water tower that may position members, handle materials, provide continuous egress or discharge water at positions elevated from the ground.

Driver - The member charged with driving the vehicle or apparatus. This member is in control of the vehicle or apparatus and therefore is responsible for its movement.

Officer - The member responsible for directing the operation of the vehicle or apparatus and its personnel.

Spotter - A member designated to direct the driver while backing up the vehicle or apparatus. This position may also be referred to as a backup person.

Vehicle - Any automobile, emergency vehicle, staff vehicle or light utility vehicle owned or leased by the Toms River Fire Department and used for department business.

906.2 POLICY

Best Practice MODIFIED

To promote firefighter safety, it is the policy of the Toms River Fire Department that drivers, when feasible, will drive around the block rather than backing an apparatus or vehicle. If backing the apparatus or vehicle is necessary, the driver shall utilize spotters to avoid any potential danger. Backing the apparatus or vehicle without the aid of a spotter should only take place in unique circumstances.

906.3 OFFICER AND DRIVER RESPONSIBILITIES

Best Practice

Firefighter safety is extremely important. Backing operations are the most common cause of fire service vehicle accidents. Training and awareness of the potential dangers of such operations should reduce the incidence of firefighter injuries and fatalities.

Before backing an apparatus or vehicle, all potential impediments should be evaluated to ensure that the area is clear of obstructions.

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The officer, or the driver if there is no officer present, shall deploy spotters when backing up or as necessary to allow the safe movement of an apparatus or vehicle.

The driver should not move the vehicle or apparatus until the spotters are in place.

If the driver loses sight of the spotter, the driver shall stop the apparatus or vehicle until the spotter is back in sight.

If more than one spotter is being used, the driver will need to maintain contact with both spotters. This means shifting attention from one spotter to another frequently so as to safely move the apparatus or vehicle, while maintaining the safety of the spotters. This will require the apparatus to be moving at a slower than normal rate.

In unique circumstances where a spotter is not available and the apparatus or vehicle must be moved, the driver shall perform a complete walk-around of the vehicle or apparatus to identify any potential hazards. The driver should back the apparatus or vehicle, attempting to use minimal reverse motion prior to being able to proceed forward. In the event that the apparatus or vehicle must be backed repeatedly or for more than a short distance, the driver should repeat the walk-around as many times as necessary.

If at any time the driver feels that the situation is not safe, he/she should stop the vehicle or apparatus until the situation is corrected. This may mean getting out and physically walking around the apparatus or vehicle or in the direction the apparatus or vehicle is headed.

906.3.1 DRIVER RESPONSIBILITIES

Agency Content

- (a) Bring apparatus to complete stop.
- (b) Roll window down completely.
- (c) Make visual and verbal contact with the spotter. If you cannot see or hear the spotter, do not backup.
- (d) Driver and spotter shall establish eye contact in the left (driver's) rear view mirror at all times.
- (e) Drivers shall have a thorough knowledge of spotter hand signal.

906.4 SPOTTER RESPONSIBILITIES

Best Practice MODIFIED

Voice communication between the spotter and driver is good, but the driver may not hear the spotter over the noise of the vehicle or apparatus and other background noise. The use of portable radios to communicate between the spotter and driver may prove beneficial in certain circumstances. The spotters, the driver and the officer should maintain radio contact as well as eye contact. Universal hand signals may also be used to communicate between the driver and the spotter. Hand signals should be understood by all members to avoid confusion and to facilitate the process.

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In congested or tight areas, one spotter may be needed at the rear and one at the front of the vehicle being moved either forward or backward. Spotters should also be used when going forward in tight areas.

Spotter responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- (a) Be constantly aware of the surroundings while performing this function.
- (b) Look and listen for other vehicles and people that may enter the path of the vehicle or apparatus that is backing up.
- (c) Stop any oncoming hazard or stop the vehicle or apparatus being backed up.
- (d) Be aware of objects in the path of the vehicle or apparatus and direct the driver safely around them.
- (e) Be attentive to ground-level obstructions as well as overhead hazards (e.g., tree branches, wires, signs, canopies, ladders).
- (f) Maintain visual contact with the driver at all times.
- (g) Be in the line-of-sight of the mirrors of the vehicle or apparatus at all times.
- (h) Illuminate him/herself at night with a rear spotlight or flashlight, to remain visible to the driver.
- (i) Use hand signals to direct the driver. Hand signals should be somewhat exaggerated for clear understanding by the driver.
- (j) Stand on the ground, never on the apparatus or vehicle.
- (k) Practice skills as time permits.

906.4.1 SPOTTER RESPONSIBILITIES

Agency Content

- (a) Conduct a "circle of safety" and survey the backing area and all other sides of the vehicle checking for hazards. Before proceeding to back the apparatus, be sure to also overhead clearance.
- (b) Communicate any observed hazards to the driver.
- (c) Spotter shall be placed eight (8) to ten (10) feet to the left rear of the apparatus.
- (d) Establish visual and verbal contact with the driver and continue eye to eye contact in the left (drivers) rear view mirror at all times.
- (e) Be familiar with hand signals before allowing backing maneuvers to begin.
- (f) Stop the driver if any hazards are observed or if you are uncertain of the direction that the driver is maneuvering.

906.5 SIGNALS

Agency Content

- (a) **STRAIGHT BACK:** One hand above the head with palm toward face, waving back with hand and arm.

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- (b) TURN: Both arms pointing the same direction with index fingers extended. (Driver will advise the spotter which way the turn will be made. The spotter then assists the driver in backing apparatus. The driver's intentions must be verbally communicated to the spotter.)
- (c) STOP: Closed fist raised above the head.
- (d) DO NOT:
 - 1. Use confusing hand signals.
 - 2. Shine flashlight in mirrors.
 - 3. Use flashlights as a signaling device.

906.6 NIGHT BACKING

Agency Content

- (a) Signals will be the same.
- (b) A flashlight may be carried, but at no time will it be directed toward the mirror.
- (c) The spotter may wear a reflective vest to enhance visibility in low light situations.

906.7 BACK-UP CAMERAS

Agency Content

- (a) Rear view cameras shall be utilized only as a secondary means of checking the area behind the apparatus to assure it is clear of obstructions.
- (b) At no time shall apparatus drivers solely use the rear view cameras. These cameras in no way shall take away the use of apparatus mirrors and a spotter.