

BACKING BASICS AND ALLEY DOCK **BACKING AND PARKING...** **FOR CMV DRIVERS**

COURSE OUTLINE

- **Backing up a Commercial Motor Vehicle is one of the most difficult skills to learn as a driver... and an even harder one to master.**
 - That's not surprising. When you're backing up a CMV, you're unable to look directly behind you.
- **Even if you have a backup camera helping you, it has its limitations.**
 - Backup cameras can only display what is directly behind you, so you'll still have blind spots on the sides.
 - There's also the possibility that the camera could be obstructed by snow, mud, or debris... or become cracked or otherwise damaged.
 - And if you can't get a clear view, you are more likely to be involved in an accident.
- **Because backing can be so dangerous, the best way to prevent an accident is not to back up at all.**
 - Whenever possible, make sure that you can pull forward.
 - Don't travel in reverse if you don't have to.
- **That's because maneuvering a large vehicle in a limited amount of space while avoiding obstacles can be tricky.**
 - Additionally, traffic or pedestrians that are nearby are often unpredictable.
 - So if you're in an unfamiliar location you will need to familiarize yourself with your surroundings before you can back up safely.
- **Since you can't do this from the cab of your truck, you should “Get Out And Look” around you whenever you are unsure of your positioning.**
 - This is such an important part of the backing process that the trucking industry uses the acronym “GOAL” to remind you to check outside of your vehicle before you begin to back up.

- **Trucks can have massive blind spots, so you should inspect all six sides of the vehicle before you begin backing.**
 - The front and rear of the vehicle.
 - The left and right sides of the vehicle.
 - Above and below the vehicle.
 - If you're unsure how much room you have, using a tape measure can help you figure it out.
- **You should also note the location of potential obstacles around you, including...**
 - Overhead wires.
 - Tree limbs.
 - Overhead obstructions, such as roof awnings.
 - Other vehicles.
 - People.
- **Remember, your visibility will be limited when you're backing up.**
 - So taking that "mental picture" of the area and the placement of anything that could be in your way is very important.
 - If you need a reminder of what's around you at any point during your backing maneuver, use the "GOAL" process again.
- **Driving forward is always preferable.**
 - If driving in reverse is the only way that you can get where you're going, there are some general "safety rules" that you should follow.
- **First, make sure that your vehicle is in the best position to allow you to back up safely.**
 - This placement will vary depending on the type of backing that you need to do.
 - Try to set yourself up to make it as simple as possible.
- **As you begin to travel in reverse, you should back to the left (the "driver's side") whenever you can.**
 - Especially if you don't have a backup camera aiding you.
 - That way, you can watch the rear of your vehicle by looking out the side window.

- **Backing to the right, or "blind side" can be extremely dangerous, because it's much harder for you to see where you're going.**
 - So do everything you can to use driver's side backing.
 - Even if it means going around the block a few times to put yourself in position to do it, the added safety is worth it.
- **Whether you're backing to the left or the right, you should always use the mirrors on both sides of your vehicle to help to guide you.**
 - Watching both mirrors while in reverse will let you see if the back of your vehicle is going in the direction you want it to.
- **If you notice that you are "drifting" one way or another, you can get the truck back on course by turning the top of the steering wheel in the direction of the drift.**
 - If that doesn't set your truck up where you want it to be, you should do "pull-ups" to reposition it.
 - You can do this as often as you need to, so take your time and make sure that your vehicle is in the best possible position to continue backing up safely and accurately.
- **If you are driving a tractor trailer, there will be times when you won't be able to get your truck to where you want it to be by backing in a straight line.**
 - When you need to back up at an angle, you can use an "alley dock" backing maneuver to help you do it safely and accurately.
 - "Alley docking" means that you are backing up your truck at either a 45 degree or 90 degree angle so that you can get through a narrow space.
- **But since alley dock backing is a more complex process than straight line backing, it requires a little extra preparation and caution.**
 - Not all alley docks are the same, but there are a few rules that you should follow when you're using this maneuver.
- **Before you even set up your vehicle for an alley dock, you should always "Get Out And Look" ("GOAL") at your surroundings before you begin to back up.**
 - Locate any obstacles that might be in your path when you're approaching a dock or parking space.
 - Pay special attention to anything that will be below your sight line when you are in the cab.

- **If your destination can't be seen from the street, it's a good idea to park your truck somewhere close by and walk around the area to inspect it.**
 - This may seem like you're wasting time, but it can save you the trouble of having to come back out if you find that your vehicle won't fit into the space.
 - When you are finished inspecting your environment, it's time to get back in your truck and begin your alley dock.
- **Sometimes you might need to use a "spotter" while you're backing.**
 - This person watches your truck from the outside and tells you if you're off track.
 - If you are going to do this, you and your spotter should agree on a set of hand signals that they will use to indicate which way you should go.
- **However, using a spotter who does not have experience with large vehicles can do more harm than good.**
 - They often only watch one side of the truck and forget about the other side.
 - And they may not be familiar with the way that your truck moves.
 - So if you do use a spotter, make sure that it's someone who knows what to look for when they're guiding you, such as another truck driver.
- **If you have a backup camera, you can also use that to help you.**
 - If you don't have a backup camera, you can still use your mirrors.
 - In fact, it's important to know how to back up without a camera, since you won't always have one in the truck you are driving.
- **Once your vehicle is aligned correctly, back up slowly until you feel the dock.**
 - Then set all of the brakes and get out of your truck again to make sure that the truck is positioned where you want it.
 - If you're at a loading dock, you'll want to be contacting the dock straight-on so the dock plate will match up with your truck's floor.
- **It's easier to do damage when you are traveling in reverse because your visibility is limited.**
 - So it's worth the time to get out and check your surroundings again if you think you may not be set up correctly.

- **There is a lot about "alley dock" backing that applies to any type of truck you may be driving.**
 - But there are some "special" things you'll need to do if you're driving a tractor trailer.
- **With a tractor trailer, the way that you perform this maneuver depends on the angle at which you need to position your truck.**
 - Most of the time, you'll need to set up your vehicle either 90 or 45 degrees from where you want to be before you start to back up.
- **When you're attempting an "alley dock" at a 90 degree angle, the first thing you need to do is position your vehicle so that your driver's side is facing your destination.**
 - Although alley docking is possible from either side, it will always be easier to see what you're doing on the left side, or "driver's side".
 - So you should only back to the right side (your "blind side") when it is absolutely necessary.
 - Once you're set up, you can begin to travel slowly in reverse, until your vehicle is parallel to your target.
- **If your CMV has a backup camera, you can use it to see behind you.**
 - But it's still important to know how to back up safely using just your mirrors, since you won't always have a reliable backup camera in your vehicle.
- **There's also nothing wrong with hanging out of the driver's side window and looking behind you to ensure that your truck is on track.**
 - A direct sight line is always better than relying on a mirror or camera.
 - If you see that you're off course, just pull forward and adjust your position (you can do this as many times as you need to).
- **Next, you need to put the cab at a 90 degree angle to the trailer and change the direction that the trailer wheels are following.**
 - This is called "jacking".
- **Your trailer will "jack" in the direction that you turn the steering wheel.**
 - If you want it to jack to the right, then turn the wheel all the way to the right before you begin moving.

- **Once your trailer is in position, you need to "chase" it until it's aligned with the cab.**
 - You can do this by turning the wheel rapidly to the left and moving backward at a very slow speed until the truck and trailer line up.
 - When they are aligned, complete your maneuver by backing the truck straight into your destination.

- **The 90 degree alley dock is the most common alley dock.**
 - But you might not have enough space to jackknife your trailer when you are on a narrow street or in a busy delivery area with lots of other vehicles around.
 - In these situations, you may have to back up to your target at a 45 degree angle... which some drivers find a little trickier.

- **Just like a 90 degree dock, a 45 degree dock should be performed on the driver's side whenever it is possible.**
 - But instead of setting up your trailer at a 90 degree angle to your destination, you'll need to position it at a 45 degree angle.
 - Once you've done this, you can begin backing up very slowly... "chasing" your trailer just like you would for a 90 degree docking.
 - When the trailer is directly in front of your target, straighten the truck by cutting the wheel hard right, then hard left.

- **If the truck and trailer are not aligned, pull forward and straighten yourself out.**
 - Then, begin the maneuver again.
 - You can do this as many times as you need to until the truck and trailer are in the proper position.

*** * * SUMMARY * * ***

- **You should always use the “GOAL” process ("Get Out And Look") to familiarize yourself with your surroundings before you begin backing.**
- **An "alley dock" maneuver should be used when you're backing up through a narrow space, or any other area that you need to approach from an angle.**
- **"Alley dock" backing is usually done at a 90 or 45 degree angle.**
- **If you're going to use a “spotter” when you're “alley docking”, make sure that they're experienced... and go over the hand signals you're going to use beforehand.**
- **If you find yourself “off course” while you're backing, pull forward and adjust... as many times as you need to.**
- **While backup cameras can be helpful and are being installed in more vehicles, you can't rely on them alone. Not every vehicle will have a camera, and even when they do, it has limitations.**
- **If you take your time, have patience and go slowly, you can back and park your vehicle safely and accurately... every time!**