Preventing Backing Accidents in the Waste Industry

Bangor, ME – On 10/22/19 a 35-year-old Casella Waste employee died while working on route. Reports from industry folks indicate that his driver may have lost sight of him and backed over him Click here. “Backing incidents comprise about 25 percent of all accidents and injuries in the waste industry…”, according to SWANA Executive Director David Biderman. Please engage your folks on this tragic story AND why backing is so dangerous.

So, why is backing so much more dangerous than driving forward?

- Design of the vehicle – Backing goes against the design of the truck/equipment and makes it awkward
- Limited visibility
- Drivers/operators think that mirrors, cameras and backup sensors foolproof the backing process which causes them to let down their guard
- Unfamiliar with vehicle – Backing incidents have occurred because a driver was using a different vehicle and had not adjusted to the difference in backing with it

Tips for preventing backing accidents

- **Avoid Unnecessary Backing** – Too often drivers or operators neglect to plan ahead and place trucks and heavy equipment in positions that make backing necessary when a pull through option was available
- **Plan your backing sequence** – When you arrive at the general area where scheduled backing will take place, assess the area and look for obvious or potential threats (moving or fixed)
- Anticipate the actions of people and other vehicles in and around the truck
- Position your truck to back the shortest possible distance and preferably in a straight line
- Once positioned, place your truck in reverse then wait a moment before backing and use that time to verify it is safe to proceed and to allow your backing alarm to alert nearby pedestrians and motorists
- Once safe to initiate backing, back no faster than 3 mph
- Respond to changing conditions
- Do not back around corners or into an intersection, unless there is no other option
- Use the mirrors to scan the area frequently, watching for motion around all sides of the truck
- **Use cameras and detection systems** – Cameras and rear sensors are helpful tools that can be used to prevent backing accidents. The use of rear facing camera systems in vehicles can help minimize blind spots.
- Do not fixate on one mirror (or camera)
- Alternately check both mirrors. Don’t forget to look in front
- **Use a spotter** – If available, use a spotter to help you reverse the vehicle. Keep your spotter in view at all times. Immediately stop your vehicle if you lose site of the spotter. The driver and spotter should use hand signals that are clear and understood by both the driver and the spotter.
- Do not ride on the rear step when the truck is in reverse
- Do not attempt to mount or dismount the truck while it is moving
- **Keep helpers in site** – Drivers should never back their vehicles while a helper is riding on a rear step. If you are in reverse and lose sight of a helper, immediately stop the truck until you can see that everyone is safe.
- Turn off distractions (radio, cell phone, etc.)
- When in doubt, remember your G.O.A.L—Get Out And Look
- **Training** – When teaching critical skills to new drivers, or when asking seasoned drivers to showcase proper backing habits, a good course can demonstrate the importance of controlled backing speed, awareness of truck dimension, physical control at the wheel and the value of efficient mirror/monitor use
- **Backing courses** – Can be a useful tool, but keep in mind it takes place within a “controlled environment”. Though we may add environmental challenges to better simulate risk, a driver’s brain will always process the experience as a training exercise where a negative outcome has limited consequence. That potential outcome changes dramatically when on route. Thus, a driver who has mastered the mechanics of the backing process is not always a driver who has mastered real world backing. A course will never approach real world difficulty because of the potential for extraordinary events. Observations made of a driver while backing at a service location will tell you much more than his or her overall performance and are therefore invaluable

With over 25% of all accidents involving backing, it is incumbent that backing be an industry focus