COMMON CAUSES OF ACCIDENTS

As an experienced driver, you know about the countless variables that can make an accident happen. Behind the variety of unique reasons for every accident are common contributing factors that repeatedly come into play. Most of these factors involve human error. They include

1. **Inattention.** Many drivers just don’t pay enough attention to the serious business of driving through the ever-changing, ever-moving traffic world. *Change* is the most consistent thing on the road. There is an endless variety of important items to be identified and analyzed at every moment.

2. **Too Much Attention to Too Little.** Some drivers concentrate too much attention for too long on one item, while missing others of equal or greater importance.

3. **Not Enough Time.** Drivers often do not allow themselves adequate time to make important decisions and act upon them. This problem usually is caused by not seeing enough, soon enough.

4. **Not Enough Space.** Drivers frequently accompany each other in close-knit packs, leaving themselves no maneuvering room if they need to stop or steer clear of a sudden problem. And they tailgate, both inside and outside of packs.

5. **Not Allowing for the Mistakes of Other Drivers.** When driving, people often fail to see or anticipate the mistakes of others in time to avoid conflict.

6. **Not Enough Training.** Drivers of small vehicles can pose a variety of threats to traffic safety because their fundamental training may be inadequate. Qualifying for a driver’s license requires only limited knowledge of local laws and the basics of vehicle handling. In many states, drivers are tested only once in a vehicle, and receive further on-road tests in rare cases. Truck drivers, although better trained, also may be required to operate heavy equipment only once to obtain a license. The point is that state tests for all types of licenses do not require demonstrations of the special skills needed to avoid accidents. Moreover, it’s probably true that most small vehicle drivers are never educated about the special problems of truck drivers. This lack of understanding often adds to the traffic safety hazards that truck drivers must face.

7. **Failure to Adjust to Conditions.** Changing road, load and weather conditions that effect vehicle handling characteristics often are not acknowledged. Other conditions evolve due to actions of other motorists, but these too are often overlooked as requirements for adjustment. Many accidents can be prevented if drivers form habits allowing for early recognition of, and adaptation to, changing conditions.

8. **Attitude.** People tend to vent their emotions when driving. Attitudes caused by emotions cause accidents. Emotions diminish full concentration on driving, and often result in unsafe actions.

9. **Driver Impairment.** The influences of alcohol, drugs, fatigue and illness can lead to accidents.

10. **Vehicle Failure.** This causes a very small percentage of accidents. Many of them can be avoided if drivers take the proper precautions and perform a proper pre-trip inspection.

Our goal is to help you avoid accidents that can be caused by these and many other factors. This handbook contains a system of skills for seeing, thinking and acting that can be indispensable to your driving safety from this day forward.

COMMON CAUSES OF BACKING ACCIDENTS
There is not enough space here to list all the causes of backing accidents. Every driving environment presents its own set of variables that may contribute to hazardous circumstances. However, most backing accidents share in common one or more of these fundamental causes:

1. **Backing Unnecessarily.** Naturally, the type of truck, the job and specific conditions are factors in determining whether backing avoidance is possible. But avoidance of backing is an option that often is overlooked by many drivers.

2. **Blind Areas.** Obviously, backing requires travel into areas that can’t be seen from the driver’s seat. And for trucks, of course, blind areas can be quite large. These areas often contain a variety of hazards that drivers don’t detect in advance.

3. **Vehicle Design.** Because most vehicles are primarily designed to move forward, backing creates an awkward relationship between front and rear wheels where the rear wheels are leading, not being led as originally intended. This awkwardness is increased by tractor-trailer combinations. There are aspects of this rear-wheel pushing maneuver that can cause accidents for drivers who fail to acknowledge the difference or compensate for it. Vehicle design also can be a factor if drivers don’t adjust to differences in handling characteristics caused by various loads or by differences between various vehicles they may operate.

4. **Infrequent Backing Practice.** Because most drivers move forward most of the time, their experience in driving backward is relatively low. Thus, their backing skills are not well developed. Truck drivers, however, must develop exceptional backing skills to compensate for the special problems caused by the vehicles and environments they work in. However, the fact remains that even truck drivers have more experience driving forward than in reverse.

5. **Inadequate Mental Preparation for Backing.** Perhaps the most common cause of backing accidents is the driver who doesn’t think things through before acting. This driver doesn’t gather enough advance information about the backing environment and its surroundings. Inadequate mental preparation has many causes. For example, the driver may be preoccupied, in a hurry or having a bad day. Whatever the reason, the driver who is not fully aware of the environment is the most frequent victim of backing accidents.

6. **Inadequate Information During Backing.** Blind areas are one thing, but visible objects are another. Many drivers don’t watch for the obvious objects they can hit as they negotiate the backing maneuver. Often, because they focus on one object, they overlook others.

7. **The hazards of backing can be minimized or avoided.** The *Smith System’s Five Keys to Space Cushion Driving* work as well for backing as they do for driving forward.