
Apparatus/Vehicle Backing

905.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

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.

905.1.1 DEFINITIONS

Definitions related to this policy include:

Apparatus - Any district vehicle that is designed and equipped to support firefighting and rescue operations

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 Blue Ridge Fire District and used for district business.

905.2 POLICY

To promote firefighter safety, it is the policy of the Blue Ridge Fire District 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. Hose lines shall be picked up by driving forward over the hose rather than backing.

905.3 OFFICER AND DRIVER RESPONSIBILITIES

Firefighter safety is extremely important. Backing operations are the most common cause of fire service vehicle collisions. 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.

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.

Apparatus/Vehicle Backing

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.

905.4 SPOTTER RESPONSIBILITIES

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.

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.

Apparatus/Vehicle Backing

- (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.