



Adventist Risk Management, Inc.



Turning the Key on Vehicle Accident Prevention

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As a child growing up, one of my heroes was cowboy singer Rex Allen. He was also an actor and voice behind more than 80 Disney films. I still clearly recall a day in the early sixties when I attended the annual Rex Allen Days festivities in Willcox, Ariz. As I stood by the rodeo arena fence, I reached through and shook Rex's hand.

Ironically and tragically, in December 1999, this man who loved ranching, horses, and the west, collapsed from a massive coronary in his driveway. He suffered additional injuries when his caretaker accidentally ran over him, while backing out of the garage. Allen died later that day at the hospital after being pulled from beneath the car. News sources indicate the caretaker planned to back out and then help Rex get into the car.

When getting in our vehicles, we always have the best intentions of completing our task and returning unscathed. Unfortunately, that is not always the outcome. In fact, sometimes we do not even get off the property incident free. Drivers unintentionally back their vehicles into poles, strike roof structures, run into other vehicles, smash toys, or, even worse, strike a pet, child, or adult. Constant awareness of everything going on around us is crucial to personal safety, whether just starting out or moving down the road.

Three Keys to Backing-Out Awareness

1. Look Before You Leave

Before driving off, complete a walk around the vehicle to make sure the area is clear. Look for hidden objects, children, or animals before you back up. It may not stay clear, but you've taken an important step toward accident prevention by verifying it is safe to go.

2. Look As You Leave

As you back up, remain vigilant of what is happening in all directions. Cars or people can suddenly show up behind you. Another vehicle may back out of the spot across from you without looking. Many newer cars also have backup cameras. They are an additional useful tool, but do not depend on them alone. Add the backup camera to your awareness arsenal and combine it with the walk around, properly adjusted windows and mirrors, and listening for sounds (voices, horns, etc.) that can alert you to the presence of unseen objects.

3. Look Up

Don't forget to look up! This action is particularly useful with taller vehicles. Recently, a driver of a delivery truck knew where he wanted to go, but failed to look up and notice the overhang of our parking structure. He also did not take into account the height of his vehicle. I am sure the truck leaked for a while through the puncture hole the accident left in its cargo box. Additionally, our carport cover looked pretty bad.

Three Keys to On the Road Awareness

Awareness of surroundings is equally important when traveling down the road as it is in the parking lot. On the road, surroundings can be influenced by any number of changing conditions—from traffic, to pedestrians, to weather.

1. Distance In-Car Distractions

As part of my research for this article, I watched a compilation of accidents on YouTube. In some instances, there was little time for drivers to react to the incident that was unfolding around them. In others, a keen awareness of what was happening and quick response allowed the driver to make astounding evasive moves and come away unscratched. Reaction time is slowed when a driver is distracted by cell phones, or if his hands are occupied with food or drink. Daydreaming, putting on makeup, or driving when exhausted are other distractions that prevent drivers from avoiding an accident.

Children chase balls into streets. Pets get loose and run into roadways. Pedestrians cross in unmarked crosswalk locations and even in the middle of intersections. Bicyclists and motorcyclists can suddenly appear alongside you. Accidents occur when drivers do not see them coming and accidentally cut them off.

2. Increase Your Awareness After Dark

When the sun settles on the horizon, an even greater degree of attention is required. It's common knowledge that light-colored clothing is easier to see at night. Many pedestrians and cyclists who are out after dark become moving shadows when they wear dark pants and dark shirts or jackets. Some bikes have no reflectors or rear and front lights. An even more dangerous practice after dark is the fact that some also disobey rules of the road regarding the right of way and traffic signals.

3. Increase Awareness in Adverse Weather

Finally, you must be aware of and fully understand the effect of weather conditions on vehicle handling. In fog, rain, and snow, it is harder to see what is happening ahead and around you. The vehicle becomes more difficult to control in wet and slippery conditions and cannot stop as quickly. Accident after accident occurs because people do not slow down. Awareness requires an intelligent response to weather and road conditions around you. Although you might do everything right, the driver ahead, behind, or beside you may not. Will you be prepared?

Losing Rex was a blow to a lot of us who watched his shows or remembered his narrations and songs. I can think of many other tragic losses that might have been avoided with a little more awareness. Do you have memories of special people who suffered similar disastrous events? What is crucial is making sure we are not part of the story. Don't be either the initiator of the accident or the victim. When heading out to the car, look around, and then remain alert when backing up, pulling out, and while cruising down the road.



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References

¹<http://tucsoncitizen.com/morgue2/1999/12/18/175138-allen-s-death-a-tragic-accident-police-say/>

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