



Although the increased prevalence of rear-view cameras in vehicles has made it easier to safely back out of parking spaces, there are a number of low-tech tools and techniques drivers should also use to prevent collisions in parking lots. **BY ADAM PRINGLE**



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AVOIDING PARKING LOT

CRASHES

Parking can be a nerve-racking experience for fleet drivers, and for good reason: About 14 percent of all vehicle collisions that result in damage occur in parking lots, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS).

It's true that the increased prevalence of rear-view cameras in vehicles has made it easier for drivers to safely back out of parking spaces, and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has mandated that all new automobiles include some type of rear-view camera by 2018. However, rear-view cameras alone are not 100-percent reliable when it comes to avoiding parking lot collisions.

Scanning the Surroundings

According to Art Liggio, president of Driving Dynamics, apart from rear-view cameras, it is crucial for drivers to be fully aware of their surroundings while driving in and out of parking lots due to all of the quick and unpredictable activity that can take place, such as vehicles backing out and pedestrians walking through the parking aisles.

"The best thing drivers can do, as they're entering a parking lot, is to keep their eyes up, focus farther ahead, and let their peripheral vision assist them with the activities

that are close by. This way, they can identify outside movement seconds earlier and adjust their driving accordingly," Liggio said.

Another strategy Liggio recommended for avoiding parking lot crashes is finding parking areas where drivers can move up to the forward space if it is not occupied by another vehicle, and if the parking lot is straight and not angled. According to Liggio, Driving Dynamics trained the 800-driver fleet of a Florida-based public utility company to follow the "pull-through" parking method when possible. The result: A 96-percent reduction in the company's accident rate for backing and parking over a 15-month period.

"It is the one of the simplest ways to avoid incidents in lots, especially for large vehicles, or utility vehicles or trucks, that do not have a useful mirror system set up," Liggio noted.

In addition, Liggio suggested that drivers, if they have time to do so, try to find parking in sections of a lot where there are more spaces available and less competition for those spaces — specifically, the middle or rear of a parking lane instead of the front of the lane.

"It always amazes me that people so often circle around and around trying to find the closest spot to the building that they're going to. That is where all the heavy con-

gestion is," he said.

Liggio recommended a number of other tips for backing out safely, including:

- Doing a quick walk-around to make sure there are no obstructions near the vehicle.
- Determining if people in the immediate area are getting in or out of their vehicles.
- Honking the horn a couple of times when backing up.
- Turning on emergency flashers if it is daytime, since back-up lights may not be as noticeable to other drivers.
- Opening up the driver- and passenger-side windows to hear the nearby surroundings.

Liggio acknowledged that rear-view cameras are having a significant impact on reducing parking lot crashes, but added that they should be used in conjunction with traditional safe backing-up methods instead of as a replacement for those methods.

"People tend to become over-reliant on technology, and there are times where technology just cannot do the job. For example, you could have dirt on your sensors, or rainy weather or sun glare could affect the sensors," Liggio said.

Ultimately, Liggio's advice for avoiding parking-related crashes can be summarized in one simple phrase: "Do what you can to identify and be identified." **AF**