

JOB AID

**Accident and Breakdown  
Procedures (US)**

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Breakdowns and accidents are unplanned events. You never know if, when, where or how they will happen. But every time you get behind the wheel, you need to be prepared for the worst.

## Incidents vs. Accidents

An **incident** is an occurrence or event that interrupts normal procedure or precipitates a crisis. A breakdown is an example of an incident.

According to the DOT, an **accident** is an occurrence involving a commercial motor vehicle operating on a highway in interstate or intrastate commerce that results in:

- A fatality
- Bodily injury to a person who, because of the injury, immediately receives medical treatment away from the scene of the accident
- One or more motor vehicles incurring disabling damage because of the accident, requiring the vehicles to be transported away from the scene by a tow truck or other motor vehicle

## Prevention and Preparedness

Inspections are an important part of trip readiness. As you prepare your vehicle and yourself, consider the following:

- **Driver wellness:** Make sure you are not excessively fatigued, ill, using or influenced by drugs or alcohol, or otherwise impaired
- **Pre-trip inspections:** Make sure your vehicle is in sound mechanical condition, your paperwork is in order, your load is properly secured, and all necessary equipment is onboard
- **Emergency equipment:** Make sure you have items such as reflective triangles or other warning devices, spare fuses, and one or more suitable fire extinguishers. You may also want to have a cell phone, warm clothes for cold climates, and a response kit

## Incident Response Kit

One of the ways you can be prepared for an incident or accident is to assemble a response kit. Your kit may include:

- Your company's procedures for dealing with an accident or breakdown
- Insurance and law enforcement notification or reporting requirements
- Contact numbers
- High-visibility or reflective traffic vest
- Flashlight
- Pencils or pens
- Warning devices, such as flares or reflective triangles
- Spare fuses
- Fire extinguisher

In addition to those items already mentioned, your response kit may contain **forms**. Forms help you gather and exchange incident details such as:

- Vehicle description (make, model, color, VIN, license plate number)
- Damages or property involved
- Known or suspected injuries
- Insurance information
- Passenger and witness names, statements and contact information

Use forms to keep police-report information and other details fresh in your memory such as the date, time, location, weather and road conditions. A good tip is to keep forms in a sealed bag or container to preserve them in case they get wet.

A great way to supplement forms is to provide **sketches** or **pictures** of the scene. Because of this, you may want to include a camera in your response kit or use your cell phone to take pictures. Take pictures of the end position of vehicles, damages, skid marks, and tire tracks or ruts. Have a pencil and paper on hand to sketch diagrams of other details related to location and the sequence of events.

Whether there is an accident or an incident involving minor injury or property damage, many companies believe it to be advisable to collect **information** about an occurrence. The information about accidents isn't just for short-term insurance and liability purposes. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) requires that details like date, location, name and number of injuries be maintained at least three years after an accident. When an accident involves the release of hazardous materials cargo, additional reporting requirements will apply.

### Complying with Company Procedures

After an accident, at a minimum, company procedures and Commercial Driver License (CDL) training require you to protect the area, notify authorities, check for injuries and get help if needed. Additionally, commercial drivers must comply with post-incident drug and alcohol testing requirements if the occurrence is an accident. Recall that an accident involves vehicle towing, medical treatment away from the scene, or a fatality.

Many companies agree on several good practices in addition to minimum CDL requirements. Because procedures vary by company, always **refer to your company's specific procedures** so that you know exactly what to do when an accident or incident occurs.

In general, your company may require you to:

- Promptly report incidents and accidents so evidence, statements and other information can be collected
- Avoid admitting responsibility or blaming anyone else
- Avoid discussions regarding the scope of your insurance coverage
- Always notify and cooperate with law enforcement officials. This is especially important when injuries or significant property damages are involved

Time spent figuring out what to do after an incident or accident is time wasted when seconds count. Get to know your company's procedures before an incident or accident occurs.

## Protecting the Area

A stopped vehicle in the way of other moving vehicles is a collision waiting to happen. Even if you are well off the road, there is still a chance of a collision with passing vehicles.

To protect the accident/breakdown area:

- Try to get your vehicle to the side of the road. When breakdowns allow, choose a well-lit, flat location away from curves, where your vehicle will be easily seen by others
- Turn on flashers anytime you stop on the highway or shoulder. Lights are absolutely required until warning devices have been deployed and when warning devices are being collected, and they are recommended at all other times
- Set out flares, reflective triangles or other warning devices to warn other traffic in time to avoid the accident

When you must stop on or well off the road due to an accident or breakdown, the FMCSA has strict rules about **warning devices**. The rules are:

- One warning device must be placed on the traffic side of the vehicle, within 10 feet, in the direction of approaching traffic
- A second device must be placed in the direction of approaching traffic, approximately 100 feet away, and in the center of the lane or shoulder where the vehicle is stopped
- A third device must be placed about 100 feet away from the stopped vehicle, in the center of the lane or shoulder, in the direction away from approaching traffic
- Flame-producing warning devices (like flares) can present fire and explosion hazards if carried or used near explosive and flammable cargo – select and use warning devices wisely

Check the FMCSA website for special rules about warning devices in certain situations, such as when you are on a hill or if there is material leaking from your truck.

## First Steps after an Accident

When **notifying authorities** of an accident or incident, be prepared to provide your exact location and general details about the occurrence. Call for assistance before getting out of your vehicle. If fire or other hazards make the cab area unsafe, exit the vehicle first. If you must be outside the vehicle, wear the high-visibility or reflective vest in your response kit.

It's a common misconception that law enforcement officials always need to see an accident scene just as it occurred. When the position of vehicles could cause a collision or other hazard, efforts may need to be made to move the vehicles out of harm's way before law enforcement officials arrive. This is where your efforts to document the facts related to the scene become particularly important.

If you have **first aid** skills and are able to protect yourself against bloodborne pathogens, you may be in a position to help others until more qualified personnel arrive. Generally:

- Don't move a severely injured person unless the danger of fire or passing traffic makes it necessary
- Stop heavy bleeding by applying direct pressure to the wound
- Keep the injured person warm
- Once qualified personnel arrive, stay out of the way unless they ask you to assist them