

# U-turns, never a good decision.



A U-turn is a maneuver in which a driver changes direction by making a 180-degree turn. A U-turn on a public roadway is one of the most dangerous maneuvers that a commercial driver can perform in a large truck or tractor trailer, and should be avoided at all cost, even if legal to do so.

Performing a U-turn with a large truck or tractor-trailer is dangerous because:

- **Other drivers are not expecting a truck to make a U-turn.** Other drivers are not expecting the vehicle in front of them to suddenly slow, or are not expecting a truck to cut in front of them from an opposing lane.
- **U-turns often result in rear-end accidents.** It is difficult for other drivers to recognize speed differentials as a truck slows to go into, or accelerates coming out of, a U-turn. The other driver believes the truck is going the speed limit.
- **Other drivers may not see or recognize the truck during the U-turn.** During a U-turn, drivers from behind and from the opposing direction may only see the side of the truck and not comprehend what is happening. The truck's front and rear tail lights are pointed away from traffic while in a U-turn, making the truck very difficult to see at night or during inclement weather such as fog, snow, or rain.
- **Multiple lanes of traffic are blocked for an extended period of time.** Making a U-turn under ideal conditions can take 30 to 40 seconds or more. At 60 miles per hour, traffic over a half mile away

in each direction would be impacted by a U-turn maneuver that takes 30 seconds. In most cases, the truck driver cannot see this far so they would not be able to determine it is clear to make the U-turn. U-turns on or near a curve or crest of a hill are particularly dangerous because the truck driver cannot see approaching traffic, and other drivers may not see the truck until it is too late.

- **There is often inadequate room to make the U-turn.** A tractor-trailer needs approximately 55 to 75 feet to successfully complete a U-turn. A typical highway traffic lane is 10 to 12 feet wide. Even on four-lane highways, unless there are generous shoulders or medians, there is often inadequate room to make a U-turn. Not having adequate space leaves a driver stuck while blocking multiple lanes; requiring them to make a dangerous backing maneuver or risk rolling the truck on a soft shoulder, or hitting signs, posts, or wires adjacent to the shoulder. During a U-turn, visibility becomes a problem as mirrors are not positioned to cover blind spots.



Making a u-turn in a large truck is dangerous as it takes too long to make the maneuver.

## Common U-turn accidents.

- **Collisions with oncoming traffic coming out of a U-turn.** While coming out of a U-turn, oncoming traffic often collides with the truck. Distracted drivers may not notice the truck in time to slow down as the truck enters their lane. Some of the most severe collisions occur when the truck is traveling in the travel lane but moving slowly. Oncoming drivers, who did not see the truck make the U-turn, do not realize it is traveling well below the speed of traffic and rear-end the truck.
- **Rear-ended while slowing to make a U-turn.** Vehicles following behind are not expecting a truck to slow or stop in the middle of the road.
- **Left turn squeeze/underride.** Trucks often turn from the right lane of a 4-lane road to maneuver a U-turn. Other vehicles traveling in the left lane do not expect the truck to turn in front of them and crash into the side of the truck. On two lane roads a similar situation exists as the truck typically has to move to the right shoulder to start the U-turn. Vehicles from behind try to pass on the left, colliding with the side of the truck/trailer as it begins its turn. Also, backing accidents occur when the truck has to backup to reposition itself to negotiate the U-turn.
- **Rollovers.** Knowing there is a risk of collision while making a U-turn, drivers tend to drive through the turn too fast, periodically resulting in rollovers. Rollovers also occur on soft shoulders as drivers swing too far off the road to go into or come out of a U-turn.
- **Damage to the truck or trailer undercarriage.** This typically occurs on divided highways when an illegal U-turn is made on a poorly maintained uneven cross-over.
- **Damage to stationary objects or overhead wires.** Often there is inadequate clearance for a truck to make a U-turn. This often results in collisions with posts or other fixed objects along the roadway.

## Eliminating U-turns.

- Plan your route so as not to place yourself in a position to have to make a U-turn.
- Pay attention to where you are going so you do not miss a turn or exit, the most frequent reason drivers give for performing a U-turn.
- If you miss your turn or exit ramp go up to the next safe location to turn around. Do not try to save time by performing a dangerous U-turn maneuver.



If you bypass your turn do not make a u-turn. Make a series of turns at controlled intersections to get you headed back in the right direction.

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