

## **Emergency Vehicles – Approaching, Oncoming and Stopped**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The following is the fourth in a series of articles that will appear occasionally from the Bollinger County Emergency Responders*

When someone is catastrophically injured and/or needs medical attention, every second counts. The amount of time it takes an emergency vehicle to arrive and aid an injured person can be the difference between life and death. This means that drivers on the road must clear pathways to ensure that emergency vehicles are able to respond to emergencies quickly and safely.

The problem is an alarming 71 percent of Americans are not aware that there are laws pertaining to a driver's conduct when passing an emergency vehicle.

Actions drivers should take when approached by an emergency vehicle:

- Don't panic
- Consider the route of the vehicle and let it pass
- Comply with all traffic signs
- If necessary, pull to the side of the road and stop
- Try to avoid stopping before the brow of a hill, a bend or narrow section of road
  - Keep oncoming traffic visibility in mind
- Do not endanger others by mounting the kerb or running off the roadway (causing another incident)
- Do not brake harshly or sudden stops.

### **Emergency vehicles approaching from behind**

If you hear sirens and see flashing lights in your rear-view or side-view mirrors, the emergency vehicle you must yield to is likely traveling in the same direction as your car and seeking to occupy the same space on the roadway. In this situation, you must yield the right-of-way by SAFELY pulling over as close to the right-hand edge of the road as possible. Try to remain parallel to the road and stop completely while you wait for the emergency vehicle to pass.

Keep your eyes on other motorists and maneuver in a controlled manner as you pull over, as they will also be seeking to yield to the emergency vehicle. If there is not enough space on the road for you to move right, simply pull over as far as you can to leave the maximum amount of room for the emergency responder to pass.

### **Emergency vehicles approaching from the front**

If an emergency vehicle with active flashing lights and sirens is approaching from the opposite direction on the other side of the road, you must still yield the right-of-way. Pull over to the right and stop, just as you would if the vehicle were traveling in the same direction. It is possible that drivers on the other side of the road will not be able to pull over fully, in which case the emergency vehicle driver may need to use the center of the road or the lane you are occupying to pass through.

When the emergency vehicle has successfully passed you, pull back into your lane and resume your course of travel with caution. Most states have traffic laws stating a minimum distance that drivers must keep behind emergency vehicles with active lights and sirens.

## **Yielding to emergency vehicles at intersections**

You must yield the right-of-way to emergency response vehicles with active lights or sirens when they approach you at intersections. If you have not yet entered the intersection and the vehicle is approaching in your lane, move over to the right side of the roadway. If the vehicle is not in your lane, you may be able to hold your position without blocking them.

Do not yield to the emergency vehicle by pulling forward onto the intersection, as stopping on an intersection is illegal. Drivers who are already on the intersection as an emergency vehicle approaches must yield the right-of-way by pulling out of the intersection and stopping their car on the right-hand side of the roadway.

## **What should I do if I am approaching a Stopped Emergency Vehicle?**

There are instances when emergency vehicles are stopped, aiding individuals who have been involved in an auto collision. This is one of the most dangerous acts law enforcement and first responders do in their line of duty. 16 emergency responders were killed in struck-by incidents in the first 3 months of 2022. In 2021, 65 emergency responders were struck and killed while assisting others on roadways. An unknown number of others were injured.

Sometimes, hurried drivers try to pass slower moving vehicles on the right. This is never a good idea. Passing on the right can lead to crashes with stopped vehicles or emergency personnel because a driver will be unable to see what is up ahead until it is too late.

If you see an emergency vehicle stopped, you should reduce your speed and if it is safe to do so, move over a lane. This is known as the **Move Over Law** and applies to all 50 states. If you cannot change lanes, slow down and proceed cautiously, always fully aware of all of your surroundings.

### **Missouri's Move Over Law**

Missouri's "Move Over" Law, RSMo 304.022, states: "2. Upon approaching a stationary vehicle displaying lighted red or red and blue lights, or a stationary vehicle displaying lighted amber or amber and white lights, the driver of every motor vehicle shall:

- (1) Proceed with caution and yield the right-of-way, if possible with due regard to safety and traffic conditions, by making a lane change into a lane not adjacent to that of the stationary vehicle, if on a roadway having at least four lanes with not less than two lanes proceeding in the same direction as the approaching vehicle; or
- (2) Proceed with due caution and reduce the speed of the vehicle, maintaining a safe speed for road conditions, if changing lanes would be unsafe or impossible."

Motorists must change lanes away from the emergency vehicle if they are on a multi-lane highway and can SAFELY do so. If drivers can't change lanes safely, or they are on a two-lane highway, they must slow down while maintaining a safe speed so as not to impede other traffic. A violation can result in fines and/ or imprisonment.

No person shall willfully fail or refuse to comply with any lawful order or direction of any law-enforcement officer or traffic-control officer invested by law with authority to direct, control or regulate traffic, which order or direction related to the control of traffic.

Emergency vehicles and traffic-control officers include (but not limited to): Public Works, Law Enforcement, Fire/Rescue, Emergency Medical Service, Towing and Recovery, Emergency Management, Communications, and Highway/Transportation (MODOT or County).

Lastly, during any encounter with an emergency vehicle or traffic-control incident REMOVE all driving distractions for your safety and the safety of others. Everyone Goes Home!!!