

Emergency Vehicle Laws

By: Paul Frisman, Principal Analyst
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Issue

What are the state laws on the right of way of emergency vehicles responding to emergency calls? (This report does not include laws on police pursuit policy.)

Summary

There are several state laws that specify (1) the rights and duties of drivers of emergency vehicles responding to emergency calls; (2) when and to what types of vehicles those laws apply; and (3) the responsibility of other people, such as pedestrians, other drivers, and people driving livestock, when they encounter emergency vehicles. There are also references to emergency vehicles in laws on parking and busways.

Rights and Duties Regarding Emergency Vehicles ([CGS § 14-283](#))

How Are Emergency Vehicles Defined?

For purposes of this law, an emergency vehicle is any of the following:

1. an ambulance or vehicle operated by an emergency medical service organization responding to an emergency call;
2. a fire truck or other vehicle used by a fire department or officer of one responding to a fire or emergency call (but not returning from one);
3. a state or local police car driven by a police officer or motor vehicle inspector, responding to an emergency call or pursuing suspects; or

4. a Department of Correction (DOC) vehicle driven by a DOC officer in the course of the officer's employment and responding to an emergency call.

What May Drivers of Emergency Vehicles Do When Responding to an Emergency?

The privileges below apply only when an emergency vehicle, as defined above, is using a siren, bell, or whistle and visible flashing or revolving lights, and to any police vehicle properly using only a siren or other audible warning signal.

Generally, emergency vehicle drivers may:

1. park or stand the vehicle regardless of the motor vehicle laws;
2. except in cases involving a stopped school bus (see below), go through red lights, stop signals, and stop signs, but only after slowing or stopping enough to allow for the vehicle's safe operation;
3. drive faster than the speed limit, provided the driver doesn't endanger life or property in doing so; and
4. disregard laws, regulations, or ordinances governing the direction of movement or turning in specific directions.

Emergency vehicle drivers must immediately bring their vehicle to a stop at least 10 feet from the front when approaching, or 10 feet from the rear when overtaking, a stopped school bus displaying flashing red lights. The emergency vehicle can then proceed as long as the driver does not endanger life or property in doing so.

The law does not relieve emergency vehicle drivers of the duty to drive with due regard for the safety of people and property.

What are the Requirements for Other Drivers in the Presence of an Emergency Vehicle Responding to an Emergency?

On the immediate approach of an emergency vehicle using a siren and lights, or a police vehicle using only a siren, the driver of any other vehicle in the immediate vicinity must immediately:

1. drive to a position parallel to, and as close as possible to, the right-hand edge or curb of the road clear of any intersection;

2. stop; and
3. remain there until the emergency vehicle has passed, except when police or a firefighter directs the driver to do otherwise.

Also, drivers of non-emergency vehicles must stay at least 100 feet behind an ambulance displaying flashing lights or using a siren.

Failure to Obey the Law

[CGS § 14-283](#) specifies the actions public safety personnel may take when drivers don't obey these requirements.

Any fire department officer may remove, or cause to be removed, any vehicle on a private or public road that obstructs or retards the fire department or any officer in controlling or putting out a fire.

A fine of up to \$250 may be imposed on any person who willfully or negligently obstructs or retards (1) an ambulance or vehicle driven by a member of an emergency medical services organization responding to an emergency call or taking a patient to a hospital; (2) a fire vehicle on its way to a fire or emergency call; or (3) a state or local police vehicle, or a state police or local police officer on the way to an emergency call or pursuing suspects.

A police officer may issue a written warning or summons to the owner of a vehicle who either did not pull over for, or who obstructed, an emergency vehicle. He or she may do so based on an affidavit signed by the operator of an emergency vehicle that specifies the license plate number, color, and type of vehicle violating the law, and the date, approximate time, and location of the violation.

“Move Over” Law ([CGS § 14-283b](#))

The “Move Over” law requires a driver traveling on a highway with at least two lanes in each direction, when approaching one or more emergency vehicles that are stationary or travelling significantly below the posted speed limit on the shoulder, lane, or breakdown lane, to immediately slow to a reasonable speed below the posted speed limit and, if driving in an adjacent lane, move over one lane (unless to do so would be unsafe).

For the purposes of this law, an emergency vehicle includes any vehicle with activated flashing lights operated by (1) a member of an emergency medical services organization answering an emergency call; (2) a fire department or an officer of one responding to a fire or other emergency; or (3) a police officer, a including local police officer, constable performing criminal law

enforcement duties, special policeman, and any member of a law enforcement unit performing police duties. Additionally, an “emergency vehicle” includes wreckers (tow trucks) and any state, municipal (including borough or district), state bridge and parkway authority, or utility company maintenance vehicle used to maintain highways, bridges, and their associated facilities.

A violation is an infraction, unless it causes death or injury to the emergency vehicle driver. If the driver is injured, the violator faces a maximum \$2,500 fine. If the driver is killed, the violator faces a maximum \$10,000 fine.

This law was amended in 2017 to include non-emergency vehicles that are stopped on a highway. [PA 17-230](#), § 14, requires, starting October 1, 2017, a driver traveling in the lane next to the shoulder, lane, or breakdown lane of a highway, when approaching a stationary vehicle located on such shoulder, lane, or breakdown lane, to move over one lane, unless doing so would be unreasonable or unsafe. A violation is an infraction.

Other Laws on Emergency Vehicles

The law exempts emergency vehicles from most parking laws ([CGS § 14-251](#)) and certain other laws, as noted below.

For the purposes of the following laws, the law considers an authorized emergency vehicle to be a:

1. fire department vehicle,
2. police vehicle, and
3. public service company or municipal department ambulance or emergency vehicle the motor vehicles commissioner has designated or authorized for use as an authorized emergency vehicle ([CGS § 14-1](#)).

Pedestrian Use of Roads and Sidewalks ([CGS § 14-300c](#))

This law requires pedestrians to yield the right-of-way to any authorized emergency vehicle approaching him or her and sounding any audible signal or displaying any visual signal indicating it is involved in an emergency. The law does not relieve the emergency vehicle driver of a duty to drive with due regard for the safety of everyone using the highway, or to exercise due care to avoid striking a pedestrian.

People Guiding Livestock (CGS § 14-248b)

This law requires people guiding cattle or other livestock across a highway to yield the right of way to any authorized emergency vehicle approaching him or her and sounding any audible signal or displaying any visual signal indicating it is involved in an emergency. The law does not relieve the emergency vehicle driver of a duty to drive with due regard for the safety of everyone using the highway or to exercise due care to avoid striking a pedestrian or any livestock.

Access to Busways (CGS § 14-296bb)

This law permits only certain vehicles, including an authorized emergency vehicle responding to an emergency call, to access or travel on dedicated roadways for bus rapid transit service (busways, e.g., CTfastrak).

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