

Emergency Vehicle Driver and Officer-in-Charge Responsibilities for Safe Arrival

The safe operation of an emergency vehicle depends heavily on the thoughts and actions of the driver and the added resources and direction of the front seat officer. The primary task of any emergency vehicle driver should be to operate the vehicle in such a manner as to provide an optimum level of safety for both passengers and the general public.

Another concern for emergency vehicle drivers is to be aware that civilian vehicle operators may not react in the manner in which you expect or feel to be appropriate. In light of this, you should attempt to leave yourself alternative options when passing or overtaking civilian vehicles. Keep in mind that, when you're driving an emergency vehicle to an emergency, if another driver fails to yield the right of way, as an emergency vehicle driver you should not:

- assume the right of way
- force the right of way

For optimum safety, the officer or person riding in the front seat officer's location should be in a position to assist the driver with certain functions that can improve his or her ability to concentrate on driving and traffic awareness.

Your emergency services organization should review the following best practices and compare them to your organization's SOGs, state statutes and applicable standards. Prior to implementation the SOGs should be reviewed by legal counsel.

An emergency vehicle driver should:

- complete a "Circle of Safety" inspection around the vehicle to be driven prior to starting the vehicle—to see that all equipment is secured, that all compartment doors are securely closed, and that any physical obstructions are moved out of the way
- not move emergency vehicles until all personnel in or on the vehicle are seated and secured with seat belts and in approved riding positions
- operate the emergency vehicle in as safe and prudent a manner as possible
- drive with the safe arrival of the emergency vehicle and crew to the emergency scene as a primary responsibility
- be aware of his or her rate of closure (speed relative to the rate of time and space reduction) on other vehicles and pedestrians
- maintain a safe following distance, allowing 1 second of following distance for every 10 feet of vehicle length for speeds under 40 mph (adding 1 additional second for every 10 mph for speeds over 40 mph)
- be prepared, during an emergency response, to bring the vehicle to a complete stop for the following:
 - when directed by a law enforcement officer
 - for red traffic lights
 - for stop signs
 - at negative right-of-way intersections
 - when the driver cannot account for visible traffic in the lanes of traffic in an intersection
 - when other intersection hazards are present
 - when encountering a stopped school bus with flashing warning lights

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- obey, during non-emergency travel, all traffic control signals and signs and laws and rules set forth by state or local jurisdiction
- come to a complete stop, during emergency response or non-emergency travel, at all railroad grade crossings and:
 - turn off all sirens and air horns
 - operate the motor at idle speed
 - turn off any other sound-producing equipment or accessories
 - open the windows and listen for a train horn

Officer in Charge (OIC) Position

Whether an elected or appointed officer or not, the individual riding in the front passenger seat of an emergency vehicle is generally taking on the role of officer in charge of that vehicle. While not in physical control of the operation of the vehicle, the officer in charge provides an additional set of eyes and ears for the driver and should take responsibility for certain tasks (see below) that allow the driver to concentrate on operating the vehicle in a safe manner.

The Officer or OIC should:

- confirm for the driver that all personnel on the vehicle are seated and secured with seat belts and in approved riding positions prior to movement of the emergency vehicle
- issue verbal warnings about observed road and physical hazards to the driver
- direct the driver to cease any unsafe driving, such as excessive speed or unsafe intersection practices
- operate the radio and communications equipment during response and relay any relevant information to the driver for confirmation
- operate the sirens and audible warning devices
- check the map book, run cards or computer-aided response monitor to assist the driver in determining the safest and most direct route to the emergency scene
- observe the driver to help ensure that the vehicle is being operated in a safe and prudent manner during the response in accordance with departmental policy and state statutes
- assist the driver in crossing intersections and backing up according to the specific responsibilities outlined in organization or industry SOGs