

# Emergency vehicles

Emergency vehicle responding to calls and using warning equipment would like to pass you but will not expect you to put yourself or others in danger to facilitate this. This handout applies a commonsense approach assisting where possible.

## Highway Code References.

The Highway Code makes reference to emergency vehicle in three areas. In each instance a sensible planned response will assist.

### Highway Code Rule 31

#### Emergency vehicles.

If an ambulance, fire engine, police or other emergency vehicle approaches using flashing blue lights, headlights and/or sirens, keep off the road.

This rule applies to pedestrians but is also apt for drivers if you have not yet joined the main road. If you can safely stay out of the way let them pass. It may be that this information about an incident along a particular route will affect your choice of route.

Ambulances are easy to spot. Fire engines even easier. Both are likely to mean a possible delay on your route.



### Highway Code Rule 219

#### Emergency and Incident Support vehicles.

You should look and listen for ambulances, fire engines, police, doctors or other emergency vehicles. They may be using flashing blue, red or green lights and sounding sirens. When one approaches do not panic. Consider the route of such a vehicle and take appropriate action to let it pass, while complying with all traffic signs. If necessary, pull to the side of the road and stop, but try to avoid stopping before the brow of a hill, a bend or narrow section of road. Do not endanger yourself, other road users or pedestrians and avoid mounting the kerb. Do not brake harshly on approach to a junction or roundabout, as a following vehicle may not have the same view as you. Flashing amber beacons are normally 'Highways Agency Traffic Officers' or even road maintenance. Incident support vehicles they will generally operate slow time but be aware of their needs.

When you hear a siren the natural reaction is to look for a marked police car, a fire engine or an ambulance.

Try to be open to the possibility the vehicle trying to pass may be a plain looking car, with emergency warning equipment fitted. The lights are not always easily visible and the sirens can appear to come from a different direction. Motorcycles are now used by all emergency services and they may be hard to see, although they will make a lot of noise. Be sensible in your response and plan as an advanced driver. Stopping may

be inappropriate and slowing down may cause delay. Each situation will require its own response. The drivers of the emergency vehicles are trained to help you and should appreciate your efforts. Look for some indication of what they would like you to do, the position of the vehicle or a signal from the driver may help. If you can't help immediately, continue at a sensible speed until you can. Exceeding the speed limit is not expected of you and a camera will have no discretion if you get flashed.



Likewise with bus lane cameras you may find it difficult to prove why you went into the bus lane. (It is likely that the emergency vehicle will be using an empty bus lane in any case) As a general rule if the road is wide enough for them to pass pull over to the left and stop, if it is not wide enough keep moving until it is or you can pull into the mouth of a junction or utilise a dropped kerb (they will not expect you to drive up a kerb to allow them to pass).



At traffic light junctions or give way lines be aware that you have no exemption to ignore them. However well- intentioned your actions may be any collision or incident will be your responsibility. The presence of the emergency vehicle would merely be regarded as mitigating circumstances.

mindful of traffic bollards, parked vehicles and other hazards may help.

If you are not able to assist safely then by keeping moving at the speed limit if it is safe you are allowing them to get to their intended location (unless they indicate otherwise see above). Be positive and do not panic. If they ask you to move somewhere specifically and it is safe, follow the instruction.

Do not place yourself or others in danger by proceeding through a traffic light junction, safety is the number one consideration. Be aware a camera at the location may record you jumping the light but may not accurately capture the circumstances in which you did it. The emergency services driver is trained to make "safe" progress and will be aware that you may not be able to assist. (In these circumstances their training would suggest switching off the warning equipment to "relieve the pressure")

Be aware that a collision involving you will likely result in the emergency vehicle not arriving at their intended incident as they will be required to stop and deal as a "vicinity only" incident so they definitely do not want you "crashing" in an attempt to help.

A good plan of what to do will assist you make positive decisions. On a wide road simply showing a left signal moving left and slowing may suffice if they don't come past stop, it may be they wish to speak to you. On a narrower road choosing where to stop,

Whilst the emergency services are in certain circumstances exempt from some road traffic legislation they have to comply with a large proportion of it specifically in relation to the standard expected of a careful and competent driver.

Other examples of covert vehicles fitted with emergency warning equipment are

likely to be used by fire officers who may have this fitted to their own vehicles.

All of the emergency responders work to the rule

“No call is so urgent as to justify an accident which will in itself always cause delay”

They should be courteous and grateful for your efforts.

## Highway Code Rule 281

### Warning signs or flashing lights.

If you see or hear emergency or incident support vehicles in the distance, be aware there may be an incident ahead (see Rule 219). Police officers and traffic officers may be required to work in the carriageway, for example dealing with debris, collisions or conducting rolling road blocks. Police officers will use rear-facing flashing red and blue lights and traffic officers will use rear-facing flashing red and amber lights in these situations. Watch out for such signals, slow down and be prepared to stop. You **MUST** follow any directions given by police officers or traffic officers as to whether you can safely pass the incident or blockage.

Try to be patient - if the road is closed, it is done for safety or to gather evidence. It may seem that not much is happening, but they want the road opened and moving as much as you do.

They do have better things to do! But none as important as the incident they are dealing with at the moment.

We haven't yet mentioned Doctors or some of the volunteer ambulance services, they may have vehicles fitted with warning equipment but not have any exemption from road traffic legislation, be sensible if you see them trying to get somewhere quickly - help if you are able.



## The Legal Bit

The Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and The Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2002 exempt emergency vehicles from:

- 1) observing speed limits
- 2) observing keep left/right signs
- 3) complying with traffic lights (including pedestrian controlled crossings).

These exemptions are subject to further guidelines during the emergency response training