



Alabama Law for Volunteer First-Responder Vehicle Operators

Many communities rely on volunteer fire departments for their fire protection and EMS response.

We as Alabama State Troopers often work alongside volunteer firefighters and EMS volunteers, and we appreciate the efforts of these volunteers.

This brochure is provided to educate volunteer fire and EMS personnel as to their responsibilities and legal considerations while responding to calls for service in an effort to keep them -- and the community they serve -- safe.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: As a volunteer firefighter, may I use red lights and a siren in my personal vehicle when responding to service calls?

A: No. Alabama State law restricts the use of emergency lights and siren to designated emergency vehicles.

Q: Who can designate a vehicle as an “emergency vehicle”?

A: Alabama State law (code T32-5A-115) states that only the director of the Alabama

Department of Public Safety or police chief of an incorporated city has the authority to designate a vehicle as such.

Q: Will the director of ADPS designate a personal or privately owned vehicle as an “emergency vehicle”?

A: No. Only a “publicly owned” vehicle will be considered for designation as an “emergency vehicle.”

Q: As a volunteer firefighter or volunteer EMS operating a privately owned vehicle, am I able to violate such traffic laws as speed limit, red lights, stop signs, etc., when responding to calls for service?

A: No. While operating a privately owned vehicle, you are required to obey all laws.

Q: If I am qualified and am driving the department’s fire truck or other emergency vehicles to a call with lights and siren activated, am I allowed to violate traffic laws?

A: State law allows emergency vehicle operators, while responding to emergency calls, to violate traffic laws **ONLY** while demonstrating due regard for public safety. (For example, when responding to an emergency call and you encounter a red light, you may only go through that intersection AFTER you have determined such movement can be made safely).

Q: While operating an emergency vehicle to an emergency call, am I required to have lights AND siren activated?

A: Yes. State law requires that an emergency vehicle have at least one lamp (red for fire/EMS, blue for police) AND an audible siren to be in compliance with the law.

Q: Can I have emergency lights on my personal vehicle if it is parked at an incident scene road side?

A: Yes, you may do so as long as the vehicle is parked on the side of the road and not in motion.

Q: Can a sheriff authorize an emergency vehicle in his/her county?

A: No. Under Alabama law, ONLY the director of the Alabama Department of Public Safety or the chief of police of an incorporated city has the authority to designate a vehicle as an “emergency vehicle.”

Section 32-1-1.1 defines

“emergency vehicle” as:

(3) AUTHORIZED EMERGENCY VEHICLE. Such fire department vehicles, police vehicles and ambulances as are publicly owned, and such other publicly or privately owned vehicles as are designated by the Director of Public Safety or the chief of police of an incorporated city.

Section 32-5A-115

Operation of vehicles on approach of authorized emergency vehicles; signals on emergency vehicles; duty of emergency vehicle driver.

(a) Upon the immediate approach of an authorized emergency vehicle equipped with at least one lighted lamp **and** audible signal as is required by law, the driver of every other vehicle shall yield the right-of-way and shall immediately drive to a position parallel to, and as close as possible to, the right-hand edge or curb of the roadway clear of any intersection and shall stop and remain in such position until the authorized emergency vehicle has passed, except when otherwise directed by a police officer.

(b) This section shall not operate to relieve the driver of an authorized emergency vehicle from the duty to drive with regard for the safety of all persons using the highways.

(c) Authorized emergency vehicles shall be equipped with at least one lighted lamp exhibiting a colored light as hereinafter provided visible under normal atmospheric conditions from a distance of 500 feet to the front of such vehicle and a siren, exhaust whistle, or bell capable of giving an audible signal. The color of the lighted lamp exhibited by police vehicles may be red or blue and the color of the lighted lamp exhibited by the fire department and other authorized emergency vehicles, including ambulances, shall be red. No vehicle other than a police vehicle will use a blue light. An amber or yellow light may be installed on any vehicle or class of vehicles designated by the Director of Public Safety, but such light shall serve as a warning or caution light only, and shall not cause other vehicles to yield the right-of-way. This provision shall not operate to relieve the driver of an emergency vehicle from the duty to drive with due regard for the safety of all persons using the highway nor shall it protect the driver of any such vehicle from the consequences of an arbitrary exercise of such right-of-way.

(Acts 1980, No. 80-434, p. 604, §4-106; Acts 1981, No. 81-803, p. 1412, §1.)

*For more information, please contact
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