

TENNESSEE STATUTES/CODE

“Emergency Vehicle”

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Source: Tennessee Code : TITLE 55 MOTOR AND OTHER VEHICLES : [CHAPTER 8 OPERATION OF VEHICLES - RULES OF THE ROAD](#) : 55-8-109. Obedience to any required traffic-control device.

55-8-101. Chapter definitions.

As used in this chapter and chapter 10, parts 1-5, of this title, unless the context otherwise requires:

(1) "Arterial street" means any United States or state numbered route, controlled access highway, or other major radial or circumferential street or highway designed by local authorities within their respective jurisdictions as part of a major arterial system of streets or highways;

(2) (A) "Authorized **emergency vehicle**" means vehicles of the fire department, fire patrol, police vehicles or bicycles and such emergency vehicles as are designated or authorized by the commissioner or the chief of police of an incorporated city, and vehicles operated by commissioned members of the Tennessee bureau of investigation when on official business;

(B) "Authorized **emergency vehicle** in certain counties" means vehicles owned by regular or volunteer firefighters in any county with a population of not less than thirty-two thousand seven hundred fifty (32,750) nor more than thirty-two thousand eight hundred (32,800) according to the 1980 federal census or any subsequent federal census, when such vehicles are used in responding to a fire alarm or other emergency call;

(C) (i) "Authorized **emergency vehicle**" automatically includes every ambulance and emergency medical vehicle operated by any emergency medical service licensed by the department of health pursuant to title 68, chapter 140, part 5; and, notwithstanding the provisions of any law to the contrary, regulation of such ambulances and emergency medical vehicles shall be exclusively performed by the department of health, and no special authorization, approval or filing shall be required pursuant to this chapter by the commissioner of safety;

(ii) "Authorized **emergency vehicle**" automatically includes every rescue vehicle or emergency response vehicle owned and operated by a state- chartered rescue squad, emergency lifesaving crew or active member unit of the Tennessee Association of Rescue Squads and no special authorization, approval or filing shall be required for such vehicle pursuant to this chapter by the commissioner of safety;

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55-8-132. Operation of vehicles and streetcars on approach of authorized emergency vehicles.

(a) Upon the immediate approach of an authorized **emergency vehicle** making use of audible and visual signals meeting the requirements of the applicable laws of this state, or of a police vehicle properly and lawfully making use of an audible signal only:

(1) 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; and

(2) Upon the approach of an authorized **emergency vehicle**, as above stated, the operator of every streetcar shall immediately stop such car clear of any intersection and keep it in such position until the authorized **emergency vehicle** has passed, except when otherwise directed by a police officer.

(b) Upon approaching a stationary authorized **emergency vehicle**, when such vehicle is giving a signal by use of flashing lights, a person who drives an approaching vehicle shall:

(1) Proceeding with due caution, yield the right-of-way by making a lane change into a lane not adjacent to that of the authorized **emergency vehicle**, if possible with due regard to safety and traffic conditions, if on a highway having at least four (4) lanes with

not less than two (2) lanes proceeding in the same direction as the approaching vehicle;
or

(2) Proceeding with due caution, reduce the speed of the vehicle, maintaining a safe speed for road conditions, if changing lanes would be impossible or unsafe.

(c) Upon approaching a stationary recovery vehicle or a highway maintenance vehicle, when such vehicle is giving a signal by use of authorized flashing lights, a person who drives an approaching vehicle shall:

(1) Proceeding with due caution, yield the right-of-way by making a lane change into a lane not adjacent to the stationary recovery vehicle or the highway maintenance vehicle, if possible with due regard to safety and traffic conditions, if on a highway having at least four (4) lanes with not less than two (2) lanes proceeding in the same direction as the approaching vehicle; or

(2) Proceeding with due caution, reduce the speed of the vehicle, maintaining a safe speed for road conditions, if changing lanes would be impossible or unsafe.

(d) For the purpose of this section unless the context otherwise requires:

(1) "Highway maintenance vehicle" means a vehicle used for the maintenance of highways and roadways in this state and is:

(A) Owned or operated by the department of transportation, a county, a municipality or other political subdivision of this state; or,

(B) Owned or operated by a contractor under contract with the department of transportation, a county, a municipality or other political subdivision of this state;

(2) "Recovery vehicle" means a truck that is specifically designed for towing a disabled vehicle or a combination of vehicles.

(e) A violation of this section is a Class C misdemeanor punishable only by a fine of fifty dollars (\$50.00).

(f) This section shall not operate to relieve the driver of an authorized **emergency vehicle**, a recovery vehicle or a highway maintenance vehicle from the duty to operate such vehicle with due regard for the safety of all persons using the highway.

[Acts 1955, ch. 329, § 31; T.C.A., § 59-832; Acts 2003, ch. 384, § 1.]

55-9-402. Lights required on motor vehicles - Exceptions - Regulations as to color, type and visibility distance.

(a) (1) Every motor vehicle other than a motorcycle, road roller, road machinery or farm tractor shall be equipped with at least two (2) and not more than four (4) headlights, with at least one (1) on each side of the front of the motor vehicle. No nonemergency vehicle shall operate or install emergency flashing light systems, such as strobe, wig-wag, or other flashing lights within the headlight assembly or grill area of the vehicle; provided, however, that a school bus may operate a flashing, wig-wag lighting system within the headlight assembly of the vehicle when the vehicle's visual stop signs are actuated for receiving or discharging school children.

(2) Auxiliary road lighting lamps may be used, but not more than two (2) of such lamps shall be lighted at any one (1) time in addition to the two (2) required headlights.

(3) No spotlight or auxiliary lamp shall be so aimed upon approaching another vehicle that any part of the high intensity portion of the beam therefrom is directed beyond the left side of the motor vehicle upon which the spotlight or auxiliary lamp is mounted, nor

more than one hundred feet (100') ahead of such motor vehicle.

(b) (1) Every motor vehicle shall be equipped with two (2) red tail lamps and two (2) red stoplights on the rear of such vehicle, and one (1) tail lamp and one (1) stoplight shall be on each side, except that passenger cars manufactured or assembled prior to January 1, 1939, trucks manufactured or assembled prior to January 1, 1968, and motorcycles and motor-driven cycles shall have at least one (1) red tail lamp and one (1) red stoplight. No non-emergency vehicle shall operate or install emergency flashing light systems such as strobe, wig-wag, or other flashing lights in tail light lamp, stoplight area, or factory installed emergency flasher and backup light area; provided, however, that the foregoing prohibition shall not apply to the utilization of a continuously flashing light system on a motorcycle. For the purposes of this part, "continuously flashing light system" means a brake light system on a motorcycle in which the brake lamp pulses rapidly for no more than five (5) seconds when the brake is applied, and then converts to a continuous light as a normal brake lamp until such time as the brake is released.

(2) The stoplight shall be so arranged as to be actuated by the application of the service or foot brake and shall be capable of being seen and distinguished from a distance of one hundred feet (100') to the rear of a motor vehicle in normal daylight, but shall not project a glaring or dazzling light.

(3) The stoplight may be incorporated with the tail lamp.

(c) Each lamp and stoplight required in this section shall be in good condition and operational.

(d) (1) No vehicle operated in this state shall be equipped with any flashing red or white light or any combination of red or white lights which displays to the front of such vehicle except school buses, a passenger motor vehicle operated by a rural mail carrier of the United States postal service while performing the duties of a rural mail carrier, authorized law enforcement vehicles only when used in combination with a flashing blue light, and emergency vehicles used in firefighting, including ambulances, emergency vehicles used in firefighting which are owned or operated by the division of forestry, firefighting vehicles, rescue vehicles, privately owned vehicles of regular or volunteer firefighters certified in § 55-9-201(c), or other emergency vehicles used in firefighting owned, operated, or subsidized by the governing body of any county or municipality.

(2) Any emergency rescue vehicle owned, titled and operated by a state chartered rescue squad, a member of the Tennessee Association of Rescue Squads, privately owned vehicles of regular or volunteer firefighters certified in § 55-9-201(c), and marked with lettering at least three inches (3") in size and displayed on the left and right sides of the vehicle designating it an "Emergency Rescue Vehicle," any authorized civil defense **emergency vehicle** displaying the appropriate civil defense agency markings of at least three inches (3"), and any ambulance or vehicle equipped to provide emergency medical services properly licensed as required in the state of Tennessee and displaying the proper markings, shall also be authorized to be lighted in one (1) or more of the following manners:

(A) A red or red/white visibar type with public address system;

(B) A red or red/white oscillating type light; and

(C) Blinking red or red/white lights, front and rear.

(3) Any vehicle, other than a school bus, a passenger motor vehicle operated by a rural mail carrier of the United States postal service while performing the duties of a rural mail carrier or an **emergency vehicle** authorized by this section to display flashing red or red/white lights, or authorized law enforcement vehicles using red, white, and blue lights in combination, that displays any such lights shall be considered in violation of this subsection (d).

(e) (1) Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, nothing in this section shall prohibit a highway maintenance or utility vehicle, or any other type vehicle or equipment participating, in any fashion, with highway or utility construction, maintenance, or inspection, from operating a white, amber, or white and amber light system on any location on such vehicle or equipment, other than in the taillight lamp, stoplight area, or factory installed emergency flasher and backup light area, if such light system is a strobe, flashing, oscillating, or revolving system, while the vehicle or equipment is parked upon, entering or leaving any highway or utility construction, maintenance, repair or inspection site.

(A) A white light system within the headlight assembly or grill area or that displays to the front of the vehicle; or

(B) An amber light system on any location on such vehicle other than in the taillight lamp, stoplight area, or factory installed emergency flasher and backup light area,

if such light system is flashing, oscillating, or revolving, while the vehicle is engaged in repair or maintenance work on or near any public highway.

(2) As used in this subsection (e), "utility" means any person, municipality, county, metropolitan government, cooperative, board, commission, district, or any entity created or authorized by public act, private act, or general law to provide electricity, natural gas, water, waste water services, telephone service, or any combination thereof, for sale to consumers in any particular service area.

(3) As used in subdivision (e)(2), "cooperative" means any cooperative providing utility services including, but not limited to, electric or telephone services, or both.

(4) Nothing in this subsection (e) imposes any duty or obligation to install or utilize the lighting systems allowed in this section.

(f) A violation of this section is a Class C misdemeanor.

[Acts 1931, ch. 82, § 15; 1937, ch. 245, § 5; 1941, ch. 121, § 1; C. Supp. 1950, § 2700.16 (Williams, § 2695); Acts 1957, ch. 51, § 1; 1969, ch. 40, § 1; 1970, ch. 598, § 1; 1975, ch. 342, § 1; T.C.A. (orig. ed.), § 59-905; Acts 1981, ch. 111, §§ 1, 2; 1982, ch. 850, § 3; 1989, ch. 173, §§ 2, 3; 1989, ch. 591, § 113; 1991, ch. 221, § 1; 1997, ch. 299, §§ 1-5; 2003, ch. 67, § 1; 2004, ch. 474, § 1; 2005, ch. 154, §§ 1-4.]