

## **EMERGENCY RESPONSE PROCEDURES FOR FIRE APPARATUS, MEDIC UNITS AND OTHER OFD VEHICLES**

### **GENERAL**

The driving skills needed to properly operate an emergency vehicle can be acquired with practice, experience and the application of sound safety habits.

Emergency vehicles, by law, are granted the “right-of-way” when responding to a fire or other emergency. Operators of emergency vehicles are permitted to disregard certain traffic laws and regulations in order to get emergency personnel and equipment to an incident in the shortest possible time. This privilege places a burden of responsibility on the emergency vehicle operator “to drive with due regard for the safety of other motorists and pedestrians.”

A Fire Engineering survey found that almost 82% of the accidents involving civilian and emergency vehicles could be attributed to civilian driver inattention.

When emergency vehicle accidents are analyzed, the cause most often reported is “civilian vehicles failing to yield the right-of-way to the emergency vehicle.” A contributory cause in a number of these accidents is “operator of emergency apparatus failed to insure that all traffic had yielded the right-of-way before entering the intersection.”

Tests have shown that a motorist will have great difficulty in hearing a siren or any other audible signal with windows closed, air control equipment and radio turned on. Visual signals (flashing lights) will get the attention of a motorist faster, but only if the motorist is observant.

Remember, motorists cannot grant you the right-of-way unless they see or hear you coming. Accidents will increase if emergency vehicle operators do not practice good defensive driving skills.

### **RESPONSE TO AN EMERGENCY BY FIRE DEPARTMENT APPARATUS AND VEHICLES**

#### A. Speed Limits for Responding Fire Department Apparatus and Vehicles

##### 1. City Streets and Interstate System (existing road and traffic conditions permitting)

- Engine companies, chief’s vehicles and medic units shall travel no faster than 45 mph or up to the posted speed limit above 45 mph.
- Aerial trucks shall travel no faster than 35 mph or up to the posted speed limit above 35 mph.

#### B. Red Lights and Stop Signs

**Fire Department vehicles shall come to a complete stop at all red lights and stop signs, proceeding only after the intersection is clear and opposing traffic has yielded the right-of-way.** Never assume that the other motorist can hear or see you. Always exercise due caution for the other driver.

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## C. Warning Lights, Siren and Air Horn

### 1. Travel on City Streets

a. Activate all warning lights, headlights, and siren and activate the air horn as needed.

### 2. Travel on the Interstate System

a. Responding to an Emergency Incident on the Interstate. Entering the Interstate system with all warning lights, siren and air horn activated will cause excitement and panic to motorists. It is recommended that emergency vehicle operators use sound judgment on the following:

1) Enter the Interstate system without using emergency lights, siren and air horn activated.

2) Upon approaching vehicle accidents or knowing the proper location (lane, shoulder, etc.) on which the accident has occurred, activate all emergency lights and if needed, siren and air horn.

a) If the accident is located in an opposite direction lane and inaccessible to the fire apparatus because of a barrier or other reason the Fire Officer should:

- Request additional equipment be dispatched from the opposite direction if circumstances warrant and continue responding to the accident scene.
- Fire Officers shall prohibit their personnel from walking across the Interstate system. Fire personnel shall not leave or be dropped off any apparatus until the apparatus has reached the emergency scene on any Interstate response.

3) Using the Interstate to Expedite Response Time. Warning lights, siren and air horn shall not be used when using the Interstate system to expedite to an emergency incident. Observe the posted speed limit and resume the use of warning lights, siren and air horn upon leaving the Interstate system.

Sirens go through a wide range of audio frequencies by fluctuating the sound. Motorists can hear some of these sounds. Three functions are found on modern sirens (wail, yelp and high-low). Use of the high-low function is not recommended.

Fire Department apparatus and vehicles that are responding to incidents will at some time encounter traffic congestion. Motorists hearing and seeing an emergency vehicle will panic on what action to take. Remember we are changing the environment of the traffic when we use warning lights, siren and air horn.

When encountering traffic that cannot move out of your way, turn off your siren. The siren will only excite or aggravate motorists or may even cause them to make a wrong decision, causing them or other motorists to be possibly injured in an accident. Instead, use the siren **only** when it will actually assist. Sometimes just a tap on the air horn will help. Remember, Fire personnel must contain their frustrations at these incidents for which we have no control. If it is determined that there will be a considerable delay, notify the dispatcher of your situation.

## GUIDELINES FOR MEDIC UNITS WHEN TRANSPORTING PATIENTS

### Non-Emergency Situations

CODE 1: Minimal or no apparent disease or injury. Patient transported for examination.

**No lights, no siren. Follow normal traffic patterns.**

CODE 2: Obvious illness or injury. Not serious but needs medical attention.

**No lights, no siren. Follow normal traffic patterns**

Note: The Officer in charge may transport a CODE 2 under CODE 3 conditions when the patient's condition or traffic conditions warrant. The Officer in charge shall exercise sound judgment regarding this course of action.

Examples: 1. Patient is in distress, but is not a CODE 3

2. Medic Unit caught in a traffic jam may use lights and siren in an effort to get clear of the traffic jam. Once well clear of the traffic jam; return to non-emergency operation in an inconspicuous manner. **Lights and siren shall not be used intermittently to clear intersection or for any other reason.**

CODE 4: D.O.A.

**No lights, no siren. Follow normal traffic patterns.**

### Emergency Situations

CODE 3: Apparent serious injury or illness needing immediate medical attention.

**Use lights and siren. Do not exceed 45 MPH or the posted speed limit above 45 MPH. Stop at all red lights and stop signs, proceeding only after the intersection is clear and opposing traffic has yielded the right-of-way. Never assume that the other motorist can hear or see you. Always exercise due caution for the other driver.**

CODE 99: Life threatening situation, CPR in progress.

**Use of lights and siren the same as a code 3.**

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## BACKING UP OF FIRE DEPARTMENT VEHICLES

Avoid backing when possible. Where backing is unavoidable, use guides to direct traffic and/or assist the driver in avoiding accidents. Any time an apparatus must be backed, a guide is **required\*** to direct the driver. To avoid confusion, only one crewmember should be utilized as a left rear guide. Other crewmembers should monitor traffic and other unsafe conditions that the driver or guide is unable to see; height clearance, front basket or ladder over hang clearance, etc. If needed, place a guide on the right front of the vehicles. All sides can then be monitored.

**Note\*** In an emergency situation when guides are unavailable, the driver shall dismount and walk completely around the apparatus before backing.

**The guide shall always be in the driver's view through one of the side mirrors.**

Once the driver and the guide have determined the direction of travel, **the guide shall determine and control the movement of the apparatus.** If there is doubt as to the safety of either the guide or apparatus, the driver shall stop the apparatus until the proper adjustments are made.

Emergency vehicles that have responded to an incident shall seek assistance from a credible individual(s) to assist in backing the Fire Department vehicle:

- Other fire personnel
- Police officer
- Credible bystander

Fire Department vehicles backing into the fire station bay shall have a firefighter/paramedic posted at the rear of the vehicle and in view of the driver's left side mirror.

## SIGNALS FOR BACKING UP

Straight Back: One hand above the head with palm toward face, waving back. Other hand at your side. (Left or right hand optional.)

Turn: Both arms pointing the same direction with index fingers extended. (The driver shall determine the direction of travel, the guide shall control the movement of the apparatus.)

Stop: Both arms thrust above head with open hands toward driver.

Night Backing: Signals will be the same. The guide will assure that the spotlights on the rear of the apparatus are turned on before he/she allows the apparatus to be backed. A flashlight is carried, but at no time will it be directed toward the mirror.

## **AT THE SCENE OF AN EMERGENCY**

Emergency vehicles shall display all warning lights while parked in a vulnerable position such as on or near the roadway. If needed, use cones to mark the area for added protection. Warning lights may be turned off if the emergency vehicle is completely out of the flow of traffic or if police traffic control has shut off the flow of traffic.

Placement of emergency vehicles shall be given special care and consideration for the safety of fire department personnel at an emergency scene. The apparatus should be parked so that personnel operating at an emergency scene are protected from on-coming traffic.

The Company Officer should immediately radio a request for traffic control and assign someone to direct traffic until the police arrive at the scene.

Traffic conditions may warrant the shut down of certain lanes on the interstate or any other street. (Example: request the police to close Interstate 80 westbound, 60th Street off ramp.)

Emergency vehicle drivers shall use caution when moving their vehicle into and around an emergency scene.

Safety guidelines cannot cover all possible scenarios that can develop on the street or interstate system. The officer in charge shall exercise his/her judgment regarding what course of action shall be taken.

## **OTHER APPARATUS SAFETY PROCEDURES**

During daylight hours, high beam headlights effectively augment emergency lights. Headlights are a good “eye catcher” in the rear view mirror of the car ahead as the roof-mounted warning lights may not be visible in the smaller car’s mirror. Even with hood or grill lights, headlights improve recognition at a greater distance. When it is necessary to pull into the oncoming lane, always use high beam headlights (daytime) to get the attention of any approaching vehicle.

Drivers shall always attempt to pass any vehicle on the left side. Avoid passing any vehicle on the right side while using emergency lights and siren. Some drivers will instinctively pull to the right at the sound of a siren.

Do not operate sirens within 20 feet of any hospital zone unless necessary.

Should your siren or warning lights fail during an emergency response, proceed as a non-emergency and comply with all traffic laws. Notify the dispatcher of your situation.

Should you be canceled en route to an alarm, change from emergency to non-emergency status in an inconspicuous manner. Control the speed of the vehicle. Shut down siren and warning lights.

Consider alternate routes when responding to an incident during rush hour traffic or during periods of inclement weather.

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When on a move-up, **do not test the radio**. Proceed without siren and warning lights and observe normal traffic regulations.

Emergency vehicles responding to an alarm from any location other than the assigned quarters shall, when acknowledging receipt of an alarm via radio, state the location from which they are responding. Repeat the information to the dispatcher regarding the alarm.

Fire apparatus are especially vulnerable to streets that are wet, icy or snow packed. Because of their size and weight, drive according to conditions and use extreme caution.

Fire alarm responses involving multiple companies shall use the most practical routes. Company officers and vehicle operators shall work together in establishing these routes.

Apparatus responding to an emergency shall not overtake and pass another emergency vehicle unless one is delayed or disabled.

Fire Department personnel shall have a current driver's license in his/her possession when driving any Fire Department vehicle.

Apparatus compartment doors are to be kept in the latched position. Doors shall be routinely checked, especially after use of equipment. Submit an OFD 127 to report those doors not latching properly.

Fire personnel shall not place equipment (portable radios, helmets, tools, etc.) in an unsecured manner on the emergency vehicle. Past experience has shown this to be a bad practice as the unsecured equipment is sometimes forgotten and invariably lost or damaged.

No apparatus except four-wheel drive equipment shall be driven off of a hard surfaced road unless ordered to do so by a command officer.

- A threat to life or the potential for the spread of the fire to a structure shall be the criteria used to order an apparatus off of a hard surfaced roadway.

Fire Department vehicles shall carry all the necessary accident forms on the vehicles.

Fire Department personnel are required to use seat belts when operating or riding in or on city vehicles. Members shall ride in the seats provided and shall remain seated while the vehicle is in motion.

## **DRIVERS WITH LESS THAN TWO YEARS**

Firefighters with less than two years of service shall not be assigned to drive fire apparatus under emergency conditions except in situations where no one else is available. Firefighters with less than two years of service will be allowed to drive a medic unit, but only under the following guidelines.

- Complete and pass Emergency Vehicle Operators Course - Ambulance (classroom).
- Complete and pass Emergency Vehicle Obstacle Course, by determination of the Defensive Driving Coordinator.
- Paramedic Captain/Acting Paramedic Captain's recommendation
  - a. Firefighter properly inspects the medic unit
  - b. Firefighter drives safely under non-emergency/emergency conditions, Form OFD 160 M

## **EMERGENCY VEHICLE LAWS (STATE STATUTES)**

60-6,114. Authorized emergency vehicles; privileges; conditions.

1. The driver of an authorized emergency vehicle, when responding to an emergency call or when in the pursuit of an actual or suspected violator of the law, or when responding to but not upon returning from a fire alarm, may exercise the privileges set forth in this section, but subject to the conditions stated in this act.
2. The driver of such emergency vehicle may stop, park, or stand, irrespective of the provisions of this act, and disregard regulations governing direction of movement or turning in specified directions. \*

**NOTE:** In accordance with the intent of this law, it is the policy of the Omaha Fire Department to discourage emergency response against traffic on a one way street. Traveling against traffic on a one way street shall be implemented only when an alternate route is not readily accessible. In addition, movement against traffic on a one way street shall be designed to minimize adverse impact to on coming traffic.

3. The driver of such emergency vehicle, except wreckers towing disabled vehicles, and highway maintenance vehicles and equipment may also:
  - a. Proceed past a steady red indication, a flashing red indication, or a stop sign but only after slowing down as may be necessary for safe operation
  - b. Exceed the maximum speed limits so long as he or she does not endanger life, limb or property.

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4. Except for such emergency vehicle operated as a police vehicle, the exemptions granted in this section to such emergency vehicle shall apply only when the driver of such vehicle, while in motion, sounds an audible signal by bell, siren, or exhaust whistle as may be reasonably necessary, and when such vehicle is equipped with at least one lighted lamp displaying a red light visible under normal atmospheric conditions from a distance of five hundred feet to the front of such vehicle.
5. The provisions of this section shall not relieve the driver of such emergency vehicle from the duty to drive with due regard for the safety of all persons, nor shall such provisions protect such driver from the consequences of his/her reckless disregard for the safety of others.

**NOTE:** Fire personnel encountering a motorist they feel is purposely violating any of the following laws, advise 911 center via radio with the description and license of the vehicle.

**The following paragraphs are for informational purposes only and are superceded by Omaha Fire department policy.**

## 60-6,151. Operation of Vehicles Upon the Approach of Emergency Vehicles.

1. Upon the immediate approach of an authorized emergency vehicle which makes use of proper audible or visual signals:
  - a. The driver of any 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, or to either edge or curb of a one way roadway, clear of any intersection, and shall stop and remain in such position until such emergency vehicle passes, unless otherwise directed by any police or traffic officer; and,
  - b. Any pedestrian using such roadway shall yield the right-of-way until such emergency vehicle passes, unless otherwise directed by any police or traffic officer.
2. This section shall not relieve the driver of an authorized emergency vehicle from the duty to drive with due regard for the safety of all persons using the highway.

## 60-6,183. Following Fire Apparatus in Response to an Alarm, Prohibited.

The driver of any vehicle other than one on official business shall not follow any fire apparatus traveling in response to a fire alarm closer than five hundred feet or drive into or park such vehicle within the block where fire apparatus has stopped to answer to a fire alarm.

Source: Laws 1983, LB 45, Operative date January 1, 1974.

## 60-6,184. Restrictions on Driving Over Unprotected Fire Hose.

No vehicle shall be driven over the unprotected hose of a fire department when it is laid down on any highway or private road or driveway; in use or to be used at any fire or alarm of fire, without the consent of the fire department official in command.