

Emergency Vehicle Operations in Texas



Emergency vehicle accidents are among the leading causes of death, injury, and property losses for first responders. The Texas Transportation Code governs the operation of emergency vehicles and outlines the expectations of operators. Some jurisdictions have recently shown an inclination to file criminal charges against emergency vehicle operators for their actions --- see Section 546.005 below.

Some of the most important provisions are explained below, but local officials, and operators of emergency vehicles, should be aware of the entire statute. Always consult with legal counsel regarding statutory requirements.

Section 541.201 defines an authorized emergency vehicle to include, among other things:

- A fire department or police vehicle.
- A public or private ambulance operated by a person who is licensed by the state.
- An emergency medical services vehicle that is licensed by the state and contracted to an emergency services district.

Section 545.365/546.001 allow (but don't require) the operator of an authorized emergency vehicle to:

- Park or stand essentially anywhere.
- Proceed past a red or stop signal or stop sign, after slowing as necessary for safe operation.
- Exceed a maximum speed limit if the operator does not endanger life or property (a city may regulate by ordinance the speed of an ambulance and an emergency medical services vehicle).
- Disregard a regulation governing the direction of movement or turning in specified directions.

Section 546.003/546.004 provide that an emergency vehicle operator:

- Shall use, at the discretion of the operator, audible or visual signals that meet certain requirements.
- May choose not to use audible or visual signals in certain narrowly-defined circumstances.

Section 546.005 does not relieve the operator of an authorized emergency vehicle from:

- The duty to operate the vehicle with appropriate regard for the safety of all persons; or
- The consequences of reckless disregard for the safety of others.
- (Note that the operator of an emergency vehicle is not exempt from seat belt laws.)

Additional Resources

- Texas Police Chiefs Association's free VINCIBLE roll call trainings include the SLOW DOWN and BUCKLE UP cornerstones: www.vincible.org
- Texas Transportation Code: <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/>
- International Association of Fire Fighters Emergency Vehicle Safety Program Materials: www.iaff.org/vehicle-safety/#resources
- TMLIRP [Online Learning Center](#):
 - Emergency Vehicle Driving Dynamics
 - Professional Police Driving