

## **EMERGENCY RESPONSE VEHICLE OPERATION GUIDELINES 1732**

(November 1991)

Emergency response personnel shall use mobile equipment in a manner providing maximum protection for the general public.

Drivers of authorized emergency vehicles are exempt from certain laws relating to speed limits, rights-of-way, and signs or signals when responding to a fire alarm or other genuine emergency (but not when returning from such an emergency). This exemption is valid only when the vehicle's red lights and siren are operating at the level necessary to warn other drivers and pedestrians.

However, drivers must be cognizant of the limitations of red lights and sirens. The law requires that drivers of authorized emergency vehicles use good judgment when responding to emergencies. In all cases, the safety of the general public must take precedence over the response speed of an emergency vehicle.

The fact that a vehicle is an "authorized emergency vehicle" does not by itself relieve the driver from complying with the rules of the road. Before a pedestrian or motorist can yield the right-of-way, the driver of an emergency vehicle must grant the opportunity to do so.

When responding Code 3 and traversing an intersection, the emergency vehicle shall maintain a speed that will enable it to stop without collision should its right of way be violated. The maximum speed through a stop sign or red light will be five miles per hour. At times it may be necessary to come to a complete stop at an intersection and then proceed cautiously after determining that the intersection is clear. Regardless of intersection speed, the driver must be prepared to stop should the need arise.

The following list is a set of additional guidelines to observe when operating an emergency vehicle. The department has established these guidelines in accordance with the California Vehicle Code. Drivers should:

- Avoid pulling up immediately behind a vehicle and suddenly sounding the siren.
- Avoid passing on the right unless no other course is open, and then only at safe speeds and after ensuring that any cars passed will not drive to the right as the emergency vehicle goes by.
- Fluctuate the siren throughout the tonal range rather than sounding it continuously at its highest pitch.
- Keep near the center of the roadway so that oncoming vehicles will see the red light.

- Maintain a safe distance when following another emergency vehicle. A motorist may yield to the first emergency vehicle and then pull out in front of the second.
- Use the red lights and siren judiciously on the freeway. Although, the freeway is often the best route of travel for an emergency response, the unnecessary use of red lights and siren may confuse other drivers and impede the safe flow of traffic. Drivers should only use these warning devices on the freeway when the vehicle is exceeding the posted speed limit or disregarding other traffic regulations.
- Use the air horn minimally, as excessive use may drown out the siren. During Code 3 responses the driver should only use the horn when approaching intersections, and then two or three short blasts should suffice.
- When responding Code 2 or Code 3, whether night or day, turn the headlights on. Headlights provide an additional margin of safety by assisting in drawing attention to the vehicle.

## **USE OF EMERGENCY WARNING DEVICES**

**1732.1**

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At times the rear facing amber light might be preferable to the rotating red or rear facing red light. For example, the driver might want to use the amber light when climbing a grade on a multiple lane highway in order to warn overtaking vehicles of the emergency vehicle, without causing them to stop or remain behind. In addition, parked vehicles working along a roadside may display the amber light as a warning device instead of a flashing or rotating red light.

[\(see next section\)](#)

[\(see HB Table of Contents\)](#)

[\(see Forms or Forms Samples\)](#)