



# SHARING THE ROAD WITH EMERGENCY SERVICE VEHICLES

Some basic tips

Údarás Um Shábháilteacht Ar Bhóithre  
Road Safety Authority

# Sharing the Road with Emergency Service Vehicles

## – some basic tips

Emergency services personnel risk their lives every day to help others. They might be called out to a medical emergency, a fire and rescue, a disaster response or indeed to assist in a roadside breakdown. Therefore, when you're using the public road, it is important that you pay attention to emergency vehicles as they make their way to help others. Emergency services vehicles include emergency ambulances, fire engines, Coast Guard and Garda vehicles.

The following information will help keep you and other road users safe as well as making sure those in need receive help as quickly as possible.

You need to know what to do when you see an emergency vehicle. You must react quickly, safely and carefully to allow emergency vehicles to pass.

### Emergency services

Gardaí, fire fighters, emergency ambulance paramedics/advanced paramedics and other emergency services personnel save lives in the course of their work. Every second counts when they are responding to an emergency. They must get to the scene quickly and safely without putting other road users in danger. Emergency services personnel receive specialist training to do this. But road users must also know what to do to make sure they don't get in the way of an emergency vehicle.



## Flashing lights and sirens

Flashing lights and sirens are used by emergency services vehicles when responding to various types of emergencies. The lights and sirens are intended to alert all road users that an emergency exists and that they need to take extra care. Road users should always be on the alert for Garda vehicles, emergency ambulance coast guard and fire services vehicles. Drivers should also be aware of other stationary vehicles at the scene of an emergency, such as breakdown and road clearance vehicles.

Emergency flashing lights indicate a danger. These lights are designed to be seen from a distance and offer an early warning of a hazard.

### Blue Flashing Lights and sirens

Road Traffic Legislation outlines the specific Emergency Services Vehicles that are permitted to fit blue emergency lights and sirens and specifies their use where necessary in the circumstances.

That legislation also provides for certain exemptions from road traffic law relating to the driving and use of vehicles by An Garda Síochána, the Fire Brigade and Ambulance Service vehicles, but only where the safety of other road users is not compromised.

### Amber Flashing Lights

Amber flashing lights are used by breakdown vehicles and road clearance vehicles. **They use them:**

- at the scene of an emergency;
- to let road users know they are there;
- when attending to a broken-down vehicle;
- when towing a broken-down vehicle.



## Garda signals

It is important to be familiar with Garda signals. If a garda is controlling traffic, their signals take priority over all other road signs such as traffic lights. Refer to [www.rulesoftheroad.ie](http://www.rulesoftheroad.ie) for more information on hand signals.

## Be alert

It is important to be alert and attentive at all times. Remember to keep noise levels in your vehicle at a level that allows you to hear the sirens from emergency vehicles. Be particularly alert at intersections. Observe your surroundings as emergency vehicles may come from behind you or from a secondary road.



## Motorists

### When an emergency vehicle approaches:

- **When you see blue flashing lights or hear sirens, clear the way as soon as you can do so safely.**
- Never mount the kerb unless you absolutely have to and, even then, only if you are certain that there are no pedestrians in the area.
- Check your rear view mirrors to gauge the speed of the emergency vehicle/s and also look out for pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists and other road users. Indicate your intention to pull over. Pull over only in a space that has enough space for the emergency vehicle/s to pass safely.
- Stay there until the emergency vehicle has passed. Watch out for other emergency vehicles as there may be more than one.
- Indicate that you're going to pull out again. When it's safe to do so, gradually merge back into traffic.

### Remember

#### Never:

- tailgate or overtake an emergency vehicle
- race after an emergency vehicle to get through a traffic light
- break a red light or speed to allow emergency vehicles to pass unless you're directed to do this by the Gardaí or emergency services personnel
- pass a moving emergency vehicle displaying flashing lights



## Pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists

Pedestrians, cyclists (and motorcyclists) should look and listen for emergency vehicles. It is important to think about the route of the emergency vehicle to make sure that you are not in its path. Keep in as far as possible on the correct side of the road. Pedestrians should not lean out to see where the siren / vehicles are coming from. This increases the danger of injury especially in instances where the emergency services are accompanied by Garda Escort Motorcycles.

If you are a pedestrian and there is an embankment or grass verge, you should use it (if it is safe to do so) in order to keep out of danger. If you are pushing a pram or buggy this may not be possible so make sure that you keep in as far as possible, try to anticipate the route that the emergency vehicle is taking and attempt to alert the emergency vehicle to your presence on the road.

If you have children with you, make sure that you are holding their hands at all times. It is important to wear reflective clothing at all times to make sure other road users can see you. Pedestrians should always wait until emergency vehicles have passed before crossing the road at traffic lights, pedestrian lights, zebra crossings or pelican crossings.

## Approaching the scene of an incident

- Be vigilant for Emergency Services Personnel walking around the incident site.
- Approach the scene of an incident carefully.
- Slow down to a safe speed and be prepared to stop.
- Clear the way for emergency vehicles as soon as you can do so safely.

Every second counts in an emergency situation. If emergency services personnel are delayed on their way to an emergency, it could make a big difference to the well-being of a patient.

### When you are approaching the scene of an incident:

- Always concentrate on your driving; and
- Make sure to avoid causing congestion or obstructing access to emergency vehicles.
- Depending on the circumstances and unless directed to do so, do not pull in to the hard shoulder as emergency services may need access to the incident via the hard shoulder.
- Check that there is no obvious fuel spillage, before switching on your parking and hazard warning lights.

Motorists are often seen 'rubbernecking'. This means turning your head and stretching your neck to get a better view of what's happening. It can be the cause of traffic jams as drivers slow down to 'rubberneck'. It can also cause road incidents as drivers become distracted and change their speed and/or direction while other drivers are also distracted.

If you are the first to arrive at the scene of a road incident you can reduce potential hazards and protect the well being of the people involved.

- Stay calm;
- Find a safe place to park;
- Switch off your engine and put on the handbrake;
- Switch on your hazard warning lights and parking lights;
- Be careful when getting out of your vehicle;
- Make sure you are safe when you try to help others (wear high visibility clothing); and
- Use a reflective advance-warning triangle if you have one.



## Calling for help

Contact the emergency services on 999 or 112. If this is difficult, or if there may be a delay before you have detailed information about the incident, you should still call the operator immediately with what you know.



## What to tell the operator

It is important to tell the operator the following:

### 1. What service you need

Tell the operator the service or services which you need, for example:

- Gardaí (police);
- Fire Brigade;
- Ambulance.



### 2. Your exact location and other details

Tell the operator:

- the phone number you are calling from;
- What types of vehicles are involved – for example, a tanker;
- the exact location of the incident;
- what has happened – for example, a vehicle crash or a person has been knocked down.



### 3. Casualties

Tell the operator:

- the total number of casualties, if any;
- if anyone is trapped;
- if you know of any medical conditions, for example maternity or cardiac chest pain.
- Emergency Services may ask you further questions and offer instructions on what to do and how to help the injured person(s).



### 4. Other hazards

Tell the operator if there are any other hazards such as:

- fire;
- an oil or chemical spillage.

**Remember don't hang up until the operator tells you to.**

### After you call the operator:

- Do not move the injured person(s) unless their life is in danger from fire or other hazard and it is safe for you to do so.
- Try and make sure others are safe and keep any injured people warm by placing coats or rugs around them.
- As long as it is safe to do so, you can organise bystanders to warn traffic coming from both directions, if this has not already been done.
- Be particularly careful at night by making sure that the people giving help can be seen – they should be wearing reflective clothing, illuminated clothes or carrying bright torches
- You can leave the scene if there are enough people there keeping it under control.
- Motorways and Dual-Carriageways are high-risk. If signalled by Garda vehicles to stop, you should never stop in the right-hand (overtaking) lane. Always move left and pull in where it is safe to stop, normally a hard shoulder.

### Further information

If you would like further information on emergency situations, please refer to the Rules of the Road book or the Rules of the Road website at [www.rulesoftheroad.ie](http://www.rulesoftheroad.ie)

Refer to the website of the Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC) to identify a recognized First Aid Responder Training Institute near you [www.phccit.ie](http://www.phccit.ie)

Further information is available at [www.nats.ie](http://www.nats.ie)

### Other useful contacts

Road Safety Authority

[www.rsa.ie](http://www.rsa.ie)

An Garda Síochána

[www.garda.ie](http://www.garda.ie)

National Ambulance Service

[www.hse.ie/eng/services/Find\\_a\\_Service\\_ambulanceservice/](http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/Find_a_Service_ambulanceservice/)

National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management

[www.environ.ie](http://www.environ.ie)

Irish Coast Guard

[www.transport.ie](http://www.transport.ie)

Defence Forces

[www.military.ie](http://www.military.ie)

Civil Defence

[www.civildefence.ie](http://www.civildefence.ie)

Irish Prison Service

[www.irishprisons.ie](http://www.irishprisons.ie)

### Emergency telephone numbers

Contact the emergency services on **999** or **112**.

# Working To Save Lives



Irish Coast Guard



## Údarás Um Shábháilteacht Ar Bhóithre Road Safety Authority

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