

***PURPOSE***

Drivers of emergency vehicles must often utilize emergency lights and sirens while responding to emergency incidents and exercise certain driving exemptions afforded them by Florida law.

OBJECTIVE

This guideline is intended to provide personnel with a brief overview of their responsibilities, relating to Florida law, as the driver of an emergency vehicle while responding to the scene of an emergency.

SCOPE

All Personnel

FLORIDA TRAFFIC LAW

Florida traffic laws include specific provisions for emergency vehicles while they are engaged in emergency operations. ECFR guidelines specify when and how these exceptions will be applied. The fire department driving guidelines may be, in some cases, more restrictive than state traffic laws.

Responding to emergency incidents does not in any manner reduce the responsibility to operate vehicles safely. While prompt response to emergency incidents is an organizational priority, safety is always a higher priority. The responding units must arrive safely at the location where they are needed before they can deliver the required services. Unsafe operation of an emergency vehicle creates an unacceptable risk to fire department members, to the public, and to the individuals who are in need of assistance.

The motor vehicle laws of Florida grant specific allowances and exemptions to emergency vehicles when they are responding to emergency incidents and using the required warning devices. These provisions only apply to officially recognized emergency vehicles, while they are responding to emergency incidents in compliance with all of the applicable laws and regulations.

Notwithstanding such allowances and exemptions, the driver of the emergency vehicle is required to operate responsibly at all times. The emergency vehicle driver has a duty to drive with due regard for the safety of all other persons and property.

Florida traffic laws require an emergency vehicle to be equipped with warning lights and audible warning devices. The traffic laws also require drivers to yield the right-of-way to an emergency vehicle when the warning lights and audible warning devices are in operation.

The use of warning lights and audible warning devices does not automatically grant the right-of-way to an emergency vehicle. These devices are intended to make other drivers aware of the presence of an emergency vehicle. Other drivers are required to yield the right-of-way to an emergency vehicle; however, they cannot be expected to yield the right-of-way if they do not see or are not aware of the emergency vehicle.

The emergency vehicle driver must never assume that another vehicle will yield the right-of-way; it is always the emergency vehicle driver's responsibility to ensure that the other driver has yielded the right-of-way. The emergency vehicle driver is responsible for operating in a safe and prudent manner, recognizing that other drivers could be distracted, inattentive, or simply uncooperative. The emergency vehicle driver is not permitted to employ aggressive driving techniques to force another driver to yield the right-of-way.

While responding in an emergency mode, drivers are required to make their presence evident using audible and visual warning devices. Emergency vehicle drivers should also endeavor to make their intentions as clear as possible and their vehicles as visible as possible to other drivers.