

***PURPOSE***

While responding to an emergency, drivers of emergency vehicles may encounter special situations and areas that place the public and responders at great risk.

OBJECTIVE

This guideline is intended to provide personnel with accepted safe practices when an emergency vehicle approaches a railroad crossing, stopped school bus, pedestrian crosswalk, funeral processions, or other emergency vehicles at an intersection.

SCOPE

All Personnel

RAILROAD CROSSINGS

At all times, emergency vehicles shall come to a full and complete stop at all unguarded railroad crossings. If responding to an emergency, the driver shall silence all audible warning devices and all personnel riding within the vehicle shall be silent so that the horn, bell, or whistle of an approaching train or rail maintenance vehicle can be heard. Before proceeding, the driver shall ensure that the railroad crossing is clear and that a train or rail maintenance vehicle is not approaching.

It is not always possible to hear an approaching train, due to the type of locomotives used on some rail lines (particularly electric locomotives); otherwise "normal" appearing highway vehicles, equipped with rail wheels, are also used by railroads and may be encountered at grade crossings. Emergency vehicle drivers should become familiar with the specific characteristics of the rail lines in their area.

When approaching a crossing with lowered gates and/or active lights, emergency vehicles shall come to a complete stop, turn off audible warning devices, and wait with the normal flow of traffic for the train to pass. The company officer shall notify dispatch that their unit will be delayed by train.

Warning devices and crossing gates are generally reliable, but can fail due to physical damage and/or the harsh conditions to which they are exposed—these devices are designed to fail in the "safe" mode. When approaching a grade crossing with lowered gates and/or active lights and no apparent rail traffic, the emergency vehicle driver shall silence all audible warning devices and all personnel riding within the vehicle shall be silent. The vehicle shall come to a full stop prior to the crossing; before proceeding, the emergency vehicle driver shall visually and audibly confirm that no train or other rail vehicle is approaching on the tracks. Complete confirmation may require that the company officer physically dismount the vehicle to visually check the tracks.

STOPPED SCHOOL BUS

When responding to an emergency and traveling in the same direction as a school bus, or in the opposite direction on an undivided roadway, the emergency vehicle shall not pass such school bus that has stopped with red lights flashing to load or discharge passengers, unless the bus driver clearly signals that it is safe to pass.

When clearly signaled by the bus driver that it is safe to pass a stopped school bus, the emergency vehicle shall proceed slowly and with extreme caution past the bus; all riders shall be vigilant for children while approaching and passing the bus. The emergency vehicle driver shall be prepared to stop immediately while approaching, passing, and leaving the area in which the school bus is stopped.

PEDESTRIAN CROSSWALKS

The emergency vehicle shall not exceed the posted speed limit when approaching a designated and marked pedestrian crosswalk. If the crosswalk is occupied, the emergency vehicle shall slow down and be prepared to stop if the pedestrian does not yield the right-of-way.

The use of audible warning devices shall not be used to intimidate or scare pedestrians and should only be used enough to bring attention to the approach of the emergency vehicle.

FUNERAL PROCESSIONS

When not responding to an emergency, and a funeral procession is encountered, the emergency vehicle shall pull to the right side of the road and come to a complete stop until the entire procession has passed.

If responding to an emergency, the emergency vehicle shall slow to the maximum posted speed limit, use audible warning devices only to the point necessary to warn other drivers of the emergency vehicles approach, but shall continue to the scene of the emergency.

EMERGENCY VEHICLES AT COMPLEX ENTRANCES AND INTERSECTIONS

If multiple responding emergency vehicles arrive at an intersection or building complex entrance at the same time, the first arriving emergency vehicle at the intersection shall be considered as having the right-of-way. However, a clear signal by the yielding emergency vehicle driver should be received before proceeding through the intersection.

Other considerations, such as normal first due assignment, tactical placement of apparatus, and crew staffing must also be considered. For example, due to deployment capabilities, it would be best for an engine with a crew of 4 to arrive first on-scene rather than an engine with a crew of 2. Or, it may be beneficial for ladder or truck companies to arrive ahead of an engine company so that it may be better positioned, prior to being impeded by other arriving units.

In such cases, radio contact should be made between vehicles to determine a best course of action.