



Driver Safety and Motor Vehicle Accident Scenes

Often an accident happens because of poor driving conditions. If people are paying more attention to the accident than they are to their driving it creates the possibility of another accident at the same place.

As a Towing and Recovery operator for thirty-five years and a Volunteer Fire Fighter for twenty-seven years I feel compelled to publish this article after witnessing many near misses while working accident scenes.

This article pertains to how motorists should react when they encounter an accident and emergency personnel are on the scene. The basic message is, "Drive by slowly and go away. Do not stop!" As emergency personnel, our priority is for our own safety, the safety of the accident victims as well as the safety of others on the road. Here are a few suggestions to make our jobs safer and avoid additional accidents and/or injuries.

If you encounter an accident where emergency crews are already on scene:

As soon as you see the flashing lights of the emergency vehicles ahead of you, slow down, but do not slam on the brakes (on a slippery road you could lose control).

Be alert for people, vehicles, equipment, and debris on the roadway.

Drive carefully and slowly past the scene, paying attention to anyone directing traffic.

Do not try to study the scene to figure out what happened, pay attention to your driving.

Do NOT stop and do NOT try to talk to the people on the scene.

If you were not a witness to the accident, there is no need to stop to see what happened.

There is no need to offer help, the emergency personnel are trained and would really prefer to concentrate on their work so as to provide for everyone's safety.

If you feel that you just MUST stop:

If you are NOT a witness to the accident we advise you NOT to stay at the accident scene. Carefully pull over to the same side of the road as the emergency equipment (BUT STAY WELL BACK), pull completely off the road. Do not park facing traffic with your headlights on. (If you pull opposite to the emergency equipment, you create a bottleneck for traffic and create another hazard).

Turn on your 4-way flashers.

Carefully exit your vehicle, watching for traffic. Do not walk on the highway stay well away from traffic at all times.

Watch for other vehicles losing control and heading in your direction. Be prepared to get out the way quickly.

Stay away from any equipment, especially if it is moving.

If there are people standing around who are victims, but not seriously injured, you may want to offer to shelter them in your vehicle. If you do that be sure that the emergency personnel on scene are aware of the

If you are involved in the accident, but you are not seriously injured:



Listen carefully to any instructions given to you by emergency personnel.
Stay away from any emergency equipment unless you have been told to sit inside it. If that is so, sit still, do not touch anything, and stay in the vehicle.
Do not offer to help, let the trained professionals do their job. If they do need your help, they will ask. Do not do something which you think is helpful and/or that you think that the emergency personnel have forgotten to do (e.g. release or engage the emergency brake, put the disabled vehicle in a particular gear, turn the steering wheel, turn the engine on or off, open or close windows, lock the doors, take things out of the vehicle, and NEVER take the keys).
Stay off the road and keep well away from traffic.
Stay away from the disabled vehicle; definitely do not get back into it.
Do not try to engage in conversation with emergency personnel, there is time later to ask and answer questions.

Suggestions for what to do if you are involved in an accident and THERE ARE NO INJURIES:

Call the police if there is any personal injury or if property damage exceeds \$1000 (as required by law). Talking from experience rarely is there a situation that you should not call the police. If no one is injured and your vehicle is safe to drive, move it out of the traffic flow to a safe place. If your vehicle is disabled leave your keys in the vehicle (do not engage the parking brake or lock your doors) exit your vehicle safely and move well away from traffic. Do not get back into your vehicle.
Exchange driver's license numbers, vehicle registration and insurance documentation including policy number with other driver(s) involved in the accident. Have all YOUR information READY for the police officer.
Collect contact information from witnesses.
When emergency personnel arrive, listen carefully and obey any instructions they give you. Stay away from any emergency equipment. If you have been asked to sit in an emergency vehicle, do not touch anything and stay in the vehicle until given further instructions.
Write down the details of the accident; estimate your speed, weather conditions and road conditions. Draw a sketch of the accident scene.
Obtain a copy of the police report.
Contact your insurance company or insurance agent to report the accident. Let them know where your vehicle was towed. They will send their adjuster to access damage done to your vehicle. All tow charges will be covered by your insurance company if you have collision coverage. Your agent will then advise you of their findings as to whether your vehicle is repairable or not. They may suggest a body shop repair facility to you; however, YOU have the right to take it to a facility of your choice.

Suggestions for what to do if you are involved in an accident and THERE ARE INJURIES:

If you are injured, stay in your vehicle. Emergency personnel will take care of you.
Listen carefully to any instructions given to you by emergency personnel.
If you are ambulatory (able to walk) exit vehicle safely and LEAVE YOUR KEYS IN THE VEHICLE but take your vehicle registration and insurance papers to have ready for the police officer. Do not get back into the vehicle.



Stay away from any emergency equipment (allow emergency personnel room to work). You may be asked to sit inside the rescue unit. If that is so, sit still, do not touch anything, and stay in the vehicle until given further instructions.

Stay off the road and keep well away from traffic.

If you are waiting in someone else's vehicle for emergency personnel to arrive make sure others know where you are.

Here at Buehler Automotive we are equipped to handle most towing and recovery needs, should the situation occur that you need assistance. Ken is a Level 67A Certified Wreck Master Towing & Recovery Operator. If we do not have adequate equipment for the job we have the resources to bring in more or larger equipment.

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