



BorderRAC Position Statement

Limiting Ambulance Transportation with Lights and Sirens

Position: Ambulance response and transportation with lights and sirens should be used judiciously and only in appropriate, life-threatening situations. The overuse of lights and sirens during emergency medical services (EMS) responses not only poses unnecessary risks but can also contribute to inefficiency and resource misallocation. Limiting their use can enhance patient safety, reduce costs, protect the public and improve the overall effectiveness of emergency medical care.

Rationale:

1. **Patient Safety:** Excessive use of lights and sirens can increase the likelihood of accidents, both for the ambulance crew and other road users. High-speed driving, going against traffic signals and other driving behaviors associated with lights and sirens puts both the patient in transit and other people on the road at increased risk of harm. Studies have shown that the use of sirens and lights can cause stress and agitation in patients, which may exacerbate their condition, especially in non-life-threatening cases.
2. **Clinical Outcomes:** Not all medical emergencies require the urgent, high-speed response and transportation associated with lights and sirens. In fact, using lights and sirens when they are not warranted can lead to unnecessary trauma, such as sudden acceleration and deceleration, which could destabilize some patients. For non-acute patients, a calm, controlled transport might be more beneficial and safer.
3. **Public Safety and Compliance:** The use of emergency lights and sirens has a profound impact on public safety. It increases the potential for accidents, especially when drivers do not hear or notice the approaching ambulance. Limiting their use encourages more cautious driving, both for EMS personnel and the public, leading to safer roadways overall.
4. **Evidence-Based Practices:** Research into EMS transport protocols suggests that a significant number of emergency calls do not require the use of lights and sirens. In fact, adopting a more selective approach to their use, based on clinical guidelines and protocols, can result in fewer accidents, better patient outcomes, and optimized system efficiency.

Conclusion: To ensure that emergency medical services operate at their highest capacity while safeguarding public health, the use of lights and sirens in ambulance transportation should be restricted to life-threatening conditions where immediate intervention is essential. EMS Agencies should also develop non-emergency response protocols to limit the use of lights and sirens when responding to a call for service. Through careful and evidence-based application, the safety and effectiveness of emergency medical services can be significantly enhanced.

- [NHTSA Report – Lights and Siren Use by EMS \[ems.gov\]](#)
- [NEMSQA Change Package – Improving Safety in EMS \[nemsqa.org\]](#)
- [Comprehensive Literature Review – Murray & Kue \(2017\) \[safesirens.org\]](#)
- [Redmond Fire & Rescue Risk/Benefit Analysis](#)
- <https://www.ems1.com/ambulance-safety/va-ems-limits-lights-and-sirens-use-on-lower-priority-calls>

Approved: 11/17/2025