

Special Driving Situations

Only practice and experience can make you a good driver. About 40 percent of highway crashes involve drivers under 25 years old (RMV Crash Data Department). Most of these crashes are caused by driver inexperience. To be a good driver, you must follow these rules.

- Give driving your full attention. Don't be distracted while driving. Talking to passengers, adjusting a car stereo, or eating can all be dangerous.
- Drive defensively, and keep your eyes on the road ahead. By staying alert, you will see hazards and have time to avoid them.
- Learn to drive in different situations. Practice highway driving, night driving, and handling a motor vehicle in different weather conditions.
- Know how to handle emergency situations, such as skidding or tire blowout.
- Know, understand, and obey the rules of the road.

This chapter explains defensive driving and how to handle special driving situations. It also tells you what to do if there is a crash, even if you are only a witness.



CHAPTER 5

Moving Emergency Vehicle

- Always yield the right-of-way to fire engines, ambulances, police cars, and other emergency vehicles that are using a siren and/or emergency flashing lights.
- If an emergency vehicle is coming from any direction, you must pull as close as possible to the right side of the road. Stop until the vehicle has passed. Slowly rolling is not acceptable.
- Check your mirrors and find a safe place to pull over to the right. You should not pull your vehicle to the left or slam on your brakes. Do not stop suddenly. Use your right turn signal.
- NEVER stop in the middle of an intersection. Drive through the intersection and pull over as soon as it is safe.
- After the emergency vehicle has passed, use your left turn signal and make sure the lane is clear. Be sure there are no other emergency vehicles approaching. Then you can merge back into traffic.
- It is illegal to follow closer than 300 feet behind an emergency vehicle responding to an alarm.

Stationary Emergency and Maintenance Vehicles

In 2015, there were 422 crashes involving stopped emergency and maintenance vehicles in Massachusetts.

- You must slow down and stay alert when you see an “emergency response vehicle” stopped ahead of you with its emergency lights flashing. This includes fire trucks, police cars, ambulances, and “disaster vehicles” (usually in support of other emergency vehicles and services). This also includes highway maintenance vehicles or recovery vehicles (tow truck, ramp truck, etc.) with flashing emergency lights. You must be careful for the safety of yourself and others.
- The “**move-over law**” (Chapter 418 of the Acts of 2008) requires you to be cautious and reduce your speed to a speed that is reasonable and safe for the road conditions when you approach a stationary emergency vehicle with flashing lights. On a highway with at least four lanes (at least two in the same direction you are heading), yield the right-of way by safely “moving over” to a lane that is not next to the lane the emergency vehicle is in. In other words, leave an open lane between your vehicle and the stopped emergency vehicle. If “moving-over” is not possible, you must still be cautious and reduce your speed to a reasonable and safe speed.
- Always be ready to stop if necessary when passing an emergency vehicle.
- At night, be sure to dim your high beams.
- If you need help, pull in front of the police cruiser and ask for help. Never stop behind a police cruiser. (*Do not approach a police officer who is dealing with a stopped motorist. Stand next to your vehicle on the shoulder until the police officer is finished.*)
- It is illegal to drive by or park within 800 feet of a fire. Do not drive over an unprotected fire hose unless directed to by a firefighter or public safety official.

General Guidelines if You Are Stopped by a Police Officer

State law requires you to pull over to the side of the road and stop when signaled by a police officer. You must pull over whether the officer is in a police car or on foot. Being pulled over may cause anxiety for both you and the police officer. You may be anxious about getting a

ticket or not know why you are being stopped. Police officers rarely know what to expect from a driver or passengers. Because of this, they may be anxious about their own personal safety.

Your actions during a traffic stop may determine the police officer's reaction. Arguing, disregarding the officer's instructions or requests, suggesting that the officer could be more productive by stopping other drivers, or suddenly reaching under the seat or into unseen areas of the passenger compartment are not appropriate. These actions may increase the officer's own anxiety.

Traffic law enforcement is one of a police officer's most important duties. They help to ensure the orderly flow of traffic and to prevent deaths and injuries on our public roads. There is an obvious need for constant enforcement. More persons are killed and injured in motor vehicle crashes across the U.S. each year than in all other forms of violence combined. In 2017 (the last year for which figures are available), 37,133 persons (drivers, passengers, pedestrians and bicyclists) were killed and over 2,746,000 were injured in the U.S. in crashes (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration-NHTSA). In 2017, Massachusetts had 334 deaths and 32,413 injuries from crashes (RMV Crash Data Department).

Police officers have reason to be worried about their safety during traffic enforcement. Each year in the United States, a number of police officers are killed and thousands more are assaulted. During 2018 alone, 2 police officers were killed and 5,108 others were assaulted during traffic pursuits and stops (Federal Bureau of Investigation-Uniform Crime Reports).

To help reduce the levels of anxiety, you should do the following during a traffic stop.

- Don't ignore the officer's signal or pretend you didn't see it.
- Turn on the appropriate turn signal and check your mirrors. Carefully and slowly move your vehicle completely to the side of the road. If the officer drives by and doesn't stop, return to the travel lane when it is safe.
- Do not stop your vehicle in an intersection, in front of a driveway, or in a travel lane. If the officer directs you to pull over in a certain place, pull over where directed.
- Put the car in park (if an automatic transmission) or in neutral with the parking brake on (if a standard transmission). Turn off the engine and radio.
- Stay in the vehicle (both you and your passengers). Only get out if instructed by the officer. If asked to get out of the vehicle, stay safely away from traffic and keep hands in plain view.
- If it is dark, leave your headlights on and put the interior overhead light on.
- Roll down your window as the officer walks toward you.
- The officer will usually explain why you were stopped. If not in uniform, the officer will show you their credentials or you may ask to see them.
- Wait until the officer asks for your license and registration before you (or a passenger) reach into the glove compartment. Do not suddenly reach into clothing while the officer approaches or is present. While you know you are only reaching for the appropriate documents, your movements may be reasonably seen by the officer as an attempt to reach for a weapon or to hide something. The officer may feel threatened and may react in a manner that you do not expect. Hand the documents to the officer when requested and do not present the documents in a wallet or holder. Chapter 90, Section 11 of the General Laws requires you to have your license and registration handy when operating a vehicle. There is a \$35 fine for a first offense for the failure to produce either document. If you do not have your license and registration, the officer can ask for your name and

address and, if you do not own the vehicle, the name and address of the owner. If you fail to comply, or provide a false name or address, you can be fined \$100 (Chapter 90, Section 25). You can also be arrested and face criminal charges if you refuse.

- Outside of Massachusetts, an officer may also request "proof of insurance" (based on that jurisdiction's laws). Your registration identifies your insurance carrier and explains that an insurance card is not issued under Massachusetts law.
- **Keep your hands in plain sight and tell your passengers to do the same.**
- Give your full attention to the officer and do not use a cell phone during the stop.
- Do not make any sudden movements or gestures that could seem threatening. Examples of this could be reaching under the seats or into unlit areas of the vehicle. Make sure your passengers do not do this either.
- Stay in your vehicle when the officer goes back to the police car. If you have a question, wait until the officer returns. If you find something the officer requested, hold it out the window and wait for the officer to return.
- Answer appropriately if the officer asks if there are any weapons in the vehicle.
- Be polite when the officer returns your license and registration. If the officer gives you a ticket, do not argue. Once a citation is issued, the officer is required to file it and cannot take it back. You have the right to challenge the citation in court. If you have questions about the citation, you can ask the officer to clarify. Massachusetts **does not** require you to sign a citation, but some other jurisdictions do. Read a citation before signing. Your signature should only confirm receipt of the citation, not proof of a violation.
- When the officer tells you that you can go, put on your turn signal, check your mirrors, and return to the travel lane. If you are on a highway, accelerate to a safe speed in the breakdown lane before merging into traffic.

Remember that a police officer never knows what to expect when stopping a driver. Don't let your emotions or sudden unexplained movements (or those of your passengers) cause more anxiety. The officer may be more likely to listen to you and less likely to feel threatened if you follow these guidelines.

IMPORTANT: If you believe that you were stopped by a police officer because of your race or your gender, or if you believe the officer's conduct during the stop was otherwise inappropriate, you may report this by contacting the police department or law enforcement agency of the officer who stopped you.

Driving Emergencies

In any emergency situation, it is very important to think clearly and don't panic. You often have only a short time to react. Read this section to learn what to do when an emergency occurs. It could save a life.

Skidding

You should handle a skid the same for front- and rear-wheel drive vehicles:

- Slowly remove your foot from the gas pedal and shift into neutral.
- Don't hit the brakes. You will make the skid worse.
- Turn your steering wheel **in the direction of the skid**. If your rear tires are skidding to the

left, turn your steering wheel left. If they are sliding right, steer right.

- You may need to steer left and right a few times until you get your car completely under control.

Running Off the Pavement

If you drive off the pavement and onto the shoulder of the road:

- Hold the steering wheel tightly and slowly remove your foot from the gas pedal.
- Gently apply the brake to reduce your speed.
- Check for traffic behind you, then steer gently back onto the road.

Flat Tire, Blowout, or Wheel Loss

If you get a flat tire, your tire blows out, or you lose a wheel:

- Grip the steering wheel tightly and slowly remove your foot from the gas pedal.
- Gently apply the brakes.
- If you begin to skid, turn the steering wheel **in the direction of the skid**.
- Gently straighten the car. Don't use the brake until you have the vehicle under control.
- Pull your car off the road as soon as it is safe.

Brake Failure

If your vehicle has antilock brakes and the brakes fail to respond when you are fully pressing the brake pedal, you should do the following:

- Downshift to a lower gear, and work your way down to the lowest gear, if necessary.
- Apply the parking brake gently. Hold the brake release in case your vehicle starts to skid.
- If you cannot slow your vehicle, sound your horn and flash your lights to warn drivers or pedestrians around you.

If your vehicle does not have antilock brakes, you should pump the brake pedal several times rapidly to build up brake fluid pressure. **Do not pump antilock brakes.** If this does not work, you should then follow the steps listed above.

You can determine what type of brakes you have by checking the indicator on your dashboard or checking your vehicle's user manual.

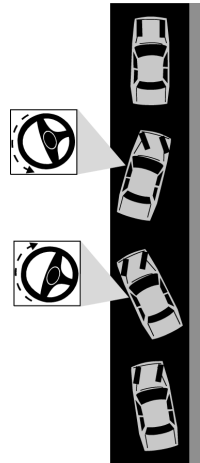
Stuck Gas Pedal

If your gas pedal sticks:

- Put your car in neutral and press the brake pedal to slow down.
- Try to free the gas pedal with your foot.
- If the gas pedal doesn't release, reapply the brakes.
- Keep your eyes on the road.
- When safe, pull your vehicle to the side of the road and bring it to a stop.

Vehicle Approaching Head On

If a vehicle is driving toward you head on in your lane:



If your vehicle skids, always turn your steering wheel in the direction of the skid.

- Slow down and pull to the right.
- Sound your horn to alert the other driver.

Headlight Failure

If your headlights suddenly go out:

- Turn on your parking lights, emergency flashers, or turn signal.
- Try the headlight switch a few times.
- Pull off the road as quickly as possible and leave your emergency flashers on.

Stalling on Railroad Tracks

If your vehicle stalls on railroad tracks and a train is coming:

- Get everyone out of the vehicle IMMEDIATELY and move as far from the tracks as you can.
- To avoid being hit by wreckage, run in a 45 degree angle away from the tracks in the direction that the train is coming, then immediately call 911.

If your vehicle stalls on railroad tracks and a train is NOT coming:

- Roll down your window or open your door and listen for a train.
- Try to start your engine.
- If your vehicle won't start, shift to neutral and try to push the vehicle off the tracks.
- If you cannot move your vehicle from the tracks, call the toll free Emergency Notification System (ENS) number that is located in the middle of the crossbuck or on the metal box near the grade crossing. Give the railroad dispatcher the DOT grade crossing locator number that is also on the sign. Be sure to specify that a vehicle is on the tracks and follow the dispatcher's instructions.

You should also call the ENS number if you see anything suspicious (such as tampering with rail switches) along a railroad.

Breakdowns

- Move your vehicle to the side of the road. Never park on a hill or a curve where others cannot see you. If you cannot get your vehicle off the pavement, get all passengers out of the vehicle and off the road.
On a highway with a breakdown lane or shoulder, move your vehicle as far from the travel lane as you can. Do not stand near the travel lane or in the breakdown lane.
- Turn on your emergency warning lights (flashers). At night, also turn on your vehicle's interior lights.
- Tie a white cloth to your antenna or door handle (use a red cloth when it's snowing). Raise your vehicle's hood.
- If you have flares or reflective signs, place them 200 feet in front of and behind your vehicle to warn other drivers.

The Highway Assistance Patrol (HAP) provides help to stranded drivers. It is operated by the MassDOT-Highway Division and sponsored by MAPFRE | Commerce Insurance.

For more information, visit [MassDOT.State.MA.US/Highway/TrafficTravelResources/EmergencyRoadsideAssistance.aspx](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massdot-state-ma-us-highway-traffic-travel-resources-emergency-roadside-assistance.aspx)

Car Catches Fire

If you see smoke coming from under your vehicle's hood:

- Pull off the road, turn off the ignition, and move away from the vehicle.
- Call the fire department or emergency services.
- Do not try to fight the fire unless you have an extinguisher.

Vehicle Drives into Water

If your car drives into water:

- Unfasten your safety belt and escape through a window.
- If you have power windows, open them quickly before the water causes them to stop working.
- Do not open a door. This would cause water to rush in and your vehicle could flip over.

If your vehicle sinks before you can get out, climb into the rear seat. An air pocket may form there. When the vehicle settles, take a deep breath and escape through a window.

Driving Through Tunnels

Public Safety is a priority at MassDOT. Please follow these important safety tips when traveling through our tunnels.

If You are in a Crash or a Disabled Vehicle in a Tunnel:

Most major tunnels within Massachusetts are monitored by the Highway Operations Center. State Police and MassDOT personnel are located throughout the tunnel system to respond to incidents as soon as possible.

- Pull to the side of the road, if you can.
- Activate your hazard flashing lights.
- Call 911 and follow instructions.
- Stay in your vehicle if it is safe to do so.
- Wait for emergency personnel for help.

When Entering A Tunnel:

- Stay alert!
- Turn on your headlights.
- Obey all signs and signals.
- Listen to the radio for traffic updates.
- Do not enter if you notice smoke near the entrance or if your car is smoking or burning.
- Maintain a safe driving distance.
- Hazardous Materials are prohibited, including propane.

In Heavy Traffic:

- Listen to the radio for updates.
- Keep a safe distance from other vehicles, even if traffic is moving slowly.
- Note the location of emergency exits.
- Follow the instructions of MassDOT officials, State Police, and message signs.

If There's A Fire:

- Stop, turn off the engine, and exit your vehicle.
- To help emergency personnel, leave your keys in the vehicle.
- For your safety, leave your stuff in the vehicle.
- Call 911.
- Follow the instructions of Fire Department, State Police, MassDOT officials, and message signs.
- Exit at the nearest tunnel entrance, unless directed otherwise.
- Help others, if you can.

Please remember: Fire and smoke can kill. Save your life, not your car.

Traffic Crashes

Each year, there are more than 130,000 motor vehicle crashes in Massachusetts. You can lower your chances of a crash by obeying the rules of the road, following the instructions in this manual, and learning to drive defensively. If you are involved in or witness any crash, state law requires you to do as follows.

If You Are Involved in a Crash

When you're involved in a crash, even a small one, you must stop your vehicle. **Never leave the scene of a crash.** It's against the law. You could be charged with a "hit and run" violation.

Property Damage Only

1. Move your vehicle off the road, if possible.
2. Exchange name, address, driver's license number, vehicle registration, and insurance information with all drivers or property owners who are involved. You must show your driver's license and registration, if asked to.
3. If you damaged a parked vehicle or other property, **you must try to locate the owner to report the crash or notify the local police.**
4. Within five days of the crash, you must file a crash report with both the RMV and the local police department. You must report *any* crash with \$1,000 or more of property damage.
5. If you've injured a cat, dog, or any other animal, **notify the local police and, if possible, the animal's owner.**

If you have a cellular phone, you can contact the state police to report any emergency by calling 911.

Crashes Involving Injuries

1. Check to see if anyone is injured.
2. Call the police and request an ambulance or EMTs, if necessary.
3. If possible, move your vehicle off the road.
4. Exchange name, address, driver's license number, vehicle registration, and insurance information with anyone who is injured and with any other drivers involved. You must show your driver's license and registration, if asked to.

5. Within five days of the crash, you must file a crash report with both the RMV and the local police department. You must report *any* crash that caused injury or death or that caused \$1,000 or more of property damage.
6. Notify your insurance company.

Emergency First Aid Tips

- Don't move an injured person unless absolutely necessary. If you must move someone because of a life-threatening situation, fully support the person's head and spine.
- Check to see if the person is breathing. If the person is not breathing and you are certified in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), begin performing CPR immediately.
- If the person is bleeding, put pressure directly on the wound. Maintain pressure until help arrives.
- Cover the injured person with a blanket or coat to provide warmth and prevent shock.

Hit and Run Crashes (Leaving the Scene of a Crash Without Identifying Yourself)

From 2015 through 2017, Massachusetts averaged 8,175 "hit & run" crashes each year in which drivers leave the scene without stopping and identifying themselves.

Leaving the scene of a crash can result in serious consequences, both for the driver (once caught), and for any victims left behind at the scene.

When you're involved in a crash, even a small one, you must stop your vehicle. **Never leave the scene of a crash involving a death, personal injuries, and/or property damage without stopping and identifying yourself. You must stay on the scene, properly identify yourself, give aid if possible, and call for emergency assistance if needed.**

If you leave the scene after a crash without properly identifying yourself, you could be criminally charged with a "leaving the scene" violation and face the following maximum penalties.

- Up to \$200 or up to two years imprisonment, or both, for leaving the scene after a crash causing damage to another vehicle or other property (M.G.L. c.90, Section 24 (2) (a))
- Up to \$1000 and imprisonment of up to two years for leaving the scene after a crash causing personal injury to any person (not resulting in death) (Section 2 (a ½) (1))
- Up to \$5000 and imprisonment of up to 2 ½ years in jail or up to 10 years in state prison for leaving the scene after a crash causing personal injury to any person that resulted in death (Section 2 (a ½) (2))

If you hit and injure or kill a cat or dog and do not notify the animal's owner or the local police, you can be fined under M.G.L. Chapter 272, Section 80H.

Any criminal conviction may result in probation costs and you may be subject to up to six-years of insurance surcharges. Your driver's license may also be suspended. See the license suspension periods and reinstatement fees in the "*Criminal Offenses and Suspensions Chart*" in Chapter 2 of this Manual.

If You Witness a Crash

If you drive by a crash and there are police and emergency vehicles there, use good judgment. Reduce your speed and drive carefully. Look out for people and equipment in the road. Do not stop or slow down to “sightsee.” This is dangerous and will cause a traffic problem.

If you see a crash and there are no police or emergency vehicles:

1. Park your car off the road. Turn on your emergency flashers to warn other drivers.
2. Check to see if anyone is injured.
3. If you have a cellular phone, call the police. If you don't have a cellular phone, tell the next person who stops with a phone to call the police, or try to flag down a passing vehicle and ask the driver to get help.
4. If anyone has flares, emergency triangles, or reflectors, put them 200 feet or more in front of and behind the crash to warn other drivers.
5. Follow the emergency first aid tips listed on the previous page.
6. If possible, move all vehicles involved in the crash to the side of the road.
7. Turn off the ignition of all vehicles involved in the crash.

Do not go near any electrical wires that have fallen because of a crash. If electrical wires have landed on a vehicle, tell the people inside to remain inside until emergency personnel arrive. Do not touch the vehicle.

Reporting a Crash

You must report any motor vehicle crash you are in that causes someone to be killed or hurt, or that causes \$1,000 or more in property damage. You must file a written report with the RMV within five days of the crash. If you are required to file a crash report, but you do not, you can be fined and your license can be suspended or revoked.

Just reporting a crash to your insurance company is not enough. You must follow all the instructions in this section.

You can get a Motor Vehicle Crash Operator Report at your local police station, an RMV Service Center, or by calling the RMV's Contact Center. You can also download the report from our website at Mass.Gov/RMV.

Where to send completed reports:

1. Mail or deliver one copy to the local police department in the city or town where the crash happened.
2. Mail one copy to your Insurance Company.
3. Mail one copy to the RMV at the address below.

**Crash Records, Registry of Motor Vehicles,
P.O. Box 55889, Boston, MA 02205-5889**

You should keep a copy of the report for your own files.

You can request a copy of a crash report completed by law enforcement online at Mass.Gov/RMV for \$20.