

Fauquier County Department of Fire Rescue

OPERATING PROCEDURE

No. 701

Vehicle Response and Operation

Effective Date: Dec. 1, 2017

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Revision Date:

Forms:

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PURPOSE

To assure the safe and efficient operation of all Fauquier County Fire Rescue vehicles while engaged in routine and emergency driving.

SCOPE

This procedure shall apply to all Fauquier County Fire Rescue members (career and volunteer) who operate emergency vehicles, to include fire apparatus, rescue vehicles, ambulances, command and support units, privately owned vehicles and any other vehicles operated by fire department members in the performance of their duties.

BACKGROUND

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 rescue members, to the public and to the individuals who are in need of assistance.

I. REQUISITE SKILLS

To discharge the duties properly and effectively, the driver operator must possess the following capabilities:

- A. **Driving knowledge.** The driver operator must be aware of the driving characteristics, capabilities, and limitations of the vehicle(s); the proper operating techniques; and safe driving methods.
- B. **Technical knowledge.** The driver operator must know how to properly operate the specialized equipment on the vehicle. A large measure of the effectiveness of the fire, rescue, and EMS team depends on the technical skill and knowledge of the driver operator.

Desire to Serve

Ability to Perform

Courage to Act

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- C. Knowledge of territory.** To assist in arriving at the scene of emergencies as expeditiously as possible, the driver operator must be knowledgeable of the roads, highways, lanes, streets and alleys in the response area.

- D. Physical fitness.** The driver operator must be capable of handling various vehicles and must possess the strength and dexterity necessary to properly control the vehicle. Emergency vehicle operation requires special skills and capabilities, including the ability to perceive hazards before they become dangerous; good hearing to determine the presence of other responding vehicles and to judge by ear the performance of the vehicle; and control and coordination of hands, arms, legs, and feet.

- E. Mental fitness.** Driver operators must be able to comprehend written and verbal instructions, to think clearly, to recognize problems or conflicts and take appropriate corrective action, and to exhibit proper driving attitudes. Overconfidence, recklessness, lack of attention, impatience, disregarding rules, discourtesy, and personal feelings are detriments to a driver's performance.

II. RESPONSIBILITY

- A. The driver of any fire department vehicle bears full responsibility for the safe operation of the vehicle at all times, including compliance with all traffic laws, as well as, department and county policies, procedures, rules and regulations.

- B. The driver shall ensure the vehicle is safe for driving; all equipment is secure and all compartment and passenger doors are closed; all passengers are seated with their seatbelts secured.

- C. If equipped, the driver shall ensure wheel chocks and cones are placed whenever the vehicle is parked.

Exception: Wheel chocks are not required when apparatus is parked in the bay of the fire station

- D. The officer-in-charge of a fire rescue vehicle is responsible for supervising the driver and all other assigned members; this includes ensuring the driver complies with traffic laws, fire department policies, procedures, rules and regulations.

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- E. All fire rescue members are required to comply with all safety policies and procedures while operating, riding in or performing any function which involves a fire department vehicle.
- F. Authority to deviate from this procedure rests solely with the company officer who will be fully responsible for any deviation from policy. The driver remains fully responsible for the safe operation of the vehicle.
- G. State and local laws exempt authorized emergency vehicles from regular traffic laws when responding to an emergency. However, neither state and local laws nor this procedure absolve the driver of an emergency vehicle from the responsibility of driving with due regard for the safety of others on the road. The driver remains fully accountable for their actions. (See section XXI).

III. TRAINING/CERTIFICATION

A. Driver Training Program:

- i. Emergency vehicles shall only be operated by individuals who comply with the applicable state driver’s license requirements and have been trained and certified to operate the particular vehicle or type/class of vehicle through a comprehensive Emergency Vehicle Operator Course (EVOC).

Exception: When the vehicle is being operated under the direct supervision of an officer or authorized driver trainer as part of a training program

B. Driving Record Review:

- i. The county shall obtain and review a copy of the member’s motor vehicle record from the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (or state in which the license is issued) for individuals who are assigned a driving position or must drive as a condition of employment. Each authorized driver’s Motor Vehicle Record shall be reviewed periodically (at intervals not to exceed three years, with annual review as an option)

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IV. SEAT BELTS

- A. All persons driving or riding in fire department vehicles shall be seated in approved riding positions with seatbelts or safety restraints fastened at all times when the vehicle is in motion.

Exception: A fire rescue member who is providing direct patient care inside an ambulance or medic unit shall be permitted to momentarily release the seat belt while the vehicle is in motion, if essential to provide immediate lifesaving patient care. When the procedure has been completed, the fire rescue member shall refasten the seat belt. Time without the protection of a seat belt shall be minimized and the provider should notify the driver when their seatbelt has been removed. When possible, the removal of the seat belt should be done when the vehicle is not in motion.

- B. The driver of any department vehicle shall not move the vehicle until all passengers have boarded the vehicle and are seated with seat belts fastened. All passengers shall remain seated and secured as long as the vehicle is in motion. Seatbelts shall not be loosened or released while enroute to dress or don equipment.
- C. Members shall not attempt to mount or dismount a moving vehicle under any circumstances.
- D. Under no circumstances shall members be allowed to ride on the outside of a moving apparatus, including the tail board, roof, aerial platform/bucket, or a top-mounted pump panel.

V. WARNING DEVICES

Warning lights shall be used at all times when fire rescue vehicles are operating in an emergency response mode. Audible warning devices (siren and/or horn) shall be used as reasonably necessary to warn other drivers and pedestrians of the approach of an emergency vehicle and request right of way. All audible and visual devices shall be used in accordance with the Code of Virginia when making an emergency response.

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VI. APPARATUS RESPONSE CATEGORIES:

- A. Priority 1: Response category for emergency incidents using appropriate emergency warning devices and adhering to all laws and statutes governing emergency vehicle response.
- B. Priority 2: Response category for non-emergency incidents, without any emergency warning devices and adhering to all laws and statutes governing motor vehicle operation.
- C. Incident Commander Responsibility:
 - i. In the event more than one piece of apparatus is dispatched to any incident it shall be the responsibility of the officer-in-charge of the first arriving unit to determine the response priority of all other incoming apparatus as soon as possible.
 - ii. At the discretion of the incident commander different response priorities may be assigned to different incoming units. For example, if the incident commander identifies the need to have the roof checked as soon as possible the truck may be directed to respond priority 1 while the other units continue priority 2.

VII. TRAFFIC PRE-EMPTION

Fire rescue personnel shall only use the traffic pre-emption system on dispatched emergency responses and when transporting all emergent class patients to medical facilities. Drivers must remember the use of the emitter system does not guarantee or grant right-of-way. Use of traffic pre-emption to control traffic signals at any other time is prohibited. When response vehicles are parked on the incident scene, drivers shall ensure the emitter is turned off, either automatically or manually, to prevent unnecessary activation of the pre-emption system.

VIII. SPEED

- A. At all times the driver must proceed with due regard to the safety of others and in accordance with state and local laws.

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- B. The driver shall never exceed a speed that is safe and prudent, based on road and weather conditions and other circumstances, including the design and capabilities of the vehicle. The posted speed limit may be exceeded only when the required warning devices are in use and when weather, traffic and road conditions are favorable. The posted speed limit shall not be exceeded under any other conditions.
- C. The posted advisory speed for a curve or active school zone shall be considered the maximum safe speed under all conditions, regardless of response conditions.

IX. INTERSECTIONS

Intersections pose significant risk for vehicles responding to emergencies; therefore, the following special precautions shall be followed:

- A. Fire rescue vehicles shall come to a full stop before entering a negative right-of-way intersection (red light, flashing red light or stop sign), blind intersection, or any intersection where hazards are present and/or the driver cannot account for all oncoming traffic lanes.
- B. If necessary, due to traffic conditions or visual obstructions, the emergency vehicle driver shall cross the intersection in stages, treating each lane as a separate intersection. The driver shall stop the vehicle, as necessary to ensure each lane may be crossed safely.
- C. When passing through an intersection where the emergency vehicle has the right-of-way, by virtue of a green light in the direction of travel or a stop signal for cross traffic, the emergency vehicle speed shall be reduced such that the vehicle can proceed with due regard for safety.
- D. If another responding emergency vehicle is met at an intersection, the vehicle with the right-of-way normally shall be given the right-of-way.

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X. OPPOSING TRAFFIC LANES

- A. Operating emergency vehicles in opposing traffic lanes is extremely hazardous under all conditions and should only be considered under exceptional circumstances (i.e., if there is no other route). Travel against the normal direction of traffic flow on a one-way street shall be limited to short distances. Emergency vehicle drivers must proceed slowly and with extreme caution in these situations.
- B. When approaching a controlled intersection (traffic lights or stop signs) in an opposing traffic lane or center turn lane, the emergency vehicle shall come to a full stop before entering the intersection, even if the traffic lane is green in the direction of travel.
- C. Designated median strip crossovers marked “Authorized Vehicles Only” shall only be used during response when apparatus can complete the turn without obstructing the flow of traffic in either travel direction, or when all traffic movement has stopped. These crossovers shall not be used in non-emergent situations.

XI. PASSING

- A. When overtaking traffic that is moving in the same direction, the emergency vehicle driver shall give the other driver an opportunity to yield the right-of-way before passing. If it is necessary to pass a vehicle that has not yielded the right of way, the emergency vehicle shall provide as wide a clearance as possible.
- B. Passing other emergency vehicles while responding to an emergency is prohibited; unless the vehicle being overtaken pulls off to the far right side of the roadway, stops, and physically waves the overtaking vehicle past or clearly makes a unit to unit radio transmission indicating the same.
- C. Emergency vehicles shall not pass a school bus that has stopped with red flashing lights to load or discharge passengers. The emergency vehicle shall stop, and then proceed slowly and with extreme caution past the school bus after the red flashing lights on the bus are turned off and all members must be vigilant for children while approaching and passing the bus. The emergency vehicle driver must be prepared to stop immediately while approaching, passing and leaving the area in which the school bus is stopped.

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XII. RAILROAD CROSSING

- A. The emergency vehicle shall come to a full stop at unguarded railway grade crossing. Caution shall be exercised at grade crossings where warning lights and/or gates are provided. It is not always possible to hear an approaching train, due to the Doppler Effect and the type of locomotives used on some rail lines. Otherwise “normal” appearing highway vehicles, equipped with rail wheels, are also used by railroads and maybe encountered at grade crossings.

- B. Warning devices and crossing gates are generally reliable, but can fail due to 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 shall come to a full stop prior to crossing; before proceeding, the emergency vehicle driver shall visually confirm no train or other rail vehicle is approaching on the tracks. Complete confirmation may require members physically dismount the vehicle to visually check the tracks.

XIII. 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.

XIV. RETURN TO ROADWAY

Fire rescue vehicle operators shall be aware of the actions to be taken if the wheels of the vehicle leave the paved surface of the roadway. In these situations, the vehicle shall be slowed, typically to a speed below 20 mph, before any attempt is made to return it to the roadway. Depending on the road conditions and the condition of the off-road surface on which the vehicle is moving, it may be necessary to carefully bring the vehicle to a complete stop before attempting a return to the roadway; under many circumstances, particularly involving heavy apparatus, this may be the safest course of action.

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XV. ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

- A. Fire rescue personnel are not permitted to be on duty, to respond to emergency incidents, to drive or operate fire department vehicles, nor to perform any other duty-related functions with a measurable quantity of alcohol, illicit drugs, or impairing prescription medication.
- B. Fire rescue members shall not perform any duty-related functions for a minimum of eight hours following the consumption of any alcoholic beverage. A longer waiting period may be required to ensure the individual is free of impairment.
- C. The driver of any fire rescue vehicle involved in an accident that causes measurable property damage, injury or death may be tested for the presence of alcohol or drugs with the least possible delay.

XVI. VEHICLE EMISSIONS

Vehicles shall be turned off and locked, if appropriate, when non-emergency conditions permit. Department members should recognize that additional fuel consumption and environmental pollution result from inappropriate vehicle operation.

XVII. VEHICLE POSITONING AND SCENE SAFETY

It shall be the Fauquier County Fire Rescue policy to position apparatus and other emergency vehicles at the emergency incident in a manner that best protects the incident scene and work area in accordance with the NOVA Highway Operations Manual.

XVIII. GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR DRIVER/OPERATORS

- A. Under wet, foggy, and other hazardous weather/road conditions, emergency vehicles must react cautiously to conditions encountered and proceed accordingly.
- B. The use of Personal Communication Devices (PCD) shall not interfere with the safe operation of fire rescue vehicles. Specifically, vehicle operators shall not use handheld PCDs while responding on incidents or proceeding to hospitals. Use of handheld PCDs when driving while not responding should be avoided and only used when absolutely necessary. The use of PCDs shall

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comply with the laws referenced in section XXI while driving any fire rescue vehicle.

XIX. MANEUVERING AT AN INCIDENT SCENE

- A. Drivers shall exercise extreme caution while maneuvering emergency vehicles at an incident scene; other drivers and pedestrians may be distracted or preoccupied by events and a variety of hazards and inadvertently step in front of or behind a moving vehicle (i.e., downed or low hanging power lines, limited visibility, and hazardous materials) may be encountered. Vehicles shall be moved slowly and cautiously, with spotters assigned to guide to driver in tight situations.
- B. When streets have been closed to regular traffic, the emergency vehicle driver remains fully responsible for the safe and prudent operation of the vehicle at all times.
- C. When operating at an incident scene where the streets have not been closed to regular traffic, fire department vehicles shall be positioned, parked or staged in a manner that considers safety as a primary factor.

XX. BACKING

- A. Backing of vehicles shall be avoided where possible.
- B. Before backing a fire rescue vehicle, the driver shall ensure the intended path is clear of hazards and obstructions.
- C. The backing of fire rescue vehicles where the driver does not have 360 degree visibility from the driver’s seat requires a spotter.
 - a. Exception: If the driver is alone and does not have a clear view of the area to the rear of the vehicle and it is essential to back a vehicle, the driver shall visually inspect the area behind before backing. After checking the area, the driver shall back the vehicle at a slow speed and with extreme caution, prepared to stop immediately if necessary. If available the driver shall intermittently check the backup camera to insure the area remains free of obstructions and/or pay attention to the sounds from the back up sensors. This exception also applies to medic unit drivers required to back into an ambulance bay at a hospital when the other crew member is not available due to patient care.

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D. Driver Responsibilities:

1. The driver is in control of the vehicle and therefore responsible for its movement
2. Open window to optimize communications
3. Do not move until the spotter is in place
4. If the driver loses sight of the spotter, the driver shall immediately stop and not move the vehicle until the spotter is in sight
5. If, at any time, the driver feels the situation is not safe, they shall stop until the situation has been corrected
6. When in doubt, get out of the vehicle and check.
7. The audio AM/FM radio shall be turned off
8. Remove headset to allow driver to hear spotter's commands

E. When backing is unavoidable, one or more spotters, wearing department issued safety vest, shall be used as guides. Two spotters should be assigned when backing large or heavy apparatus – one covering each side of the vehicle. When available, a third spotter can be used to monitor traffic or especially in the case of aerial apparatus, watch the front of the vehicle for overhead obstructions.

F. A spotter is responsible for assisting the driver and ensuring any potential hazards are avoided. Standard signals shall be used to communicate with the driver during the backing maneuver; hand signals or voice signals can be employed for this purpose. The spotter shall direct the driver to stop at any time the backing maneuver cannot be completed safely.

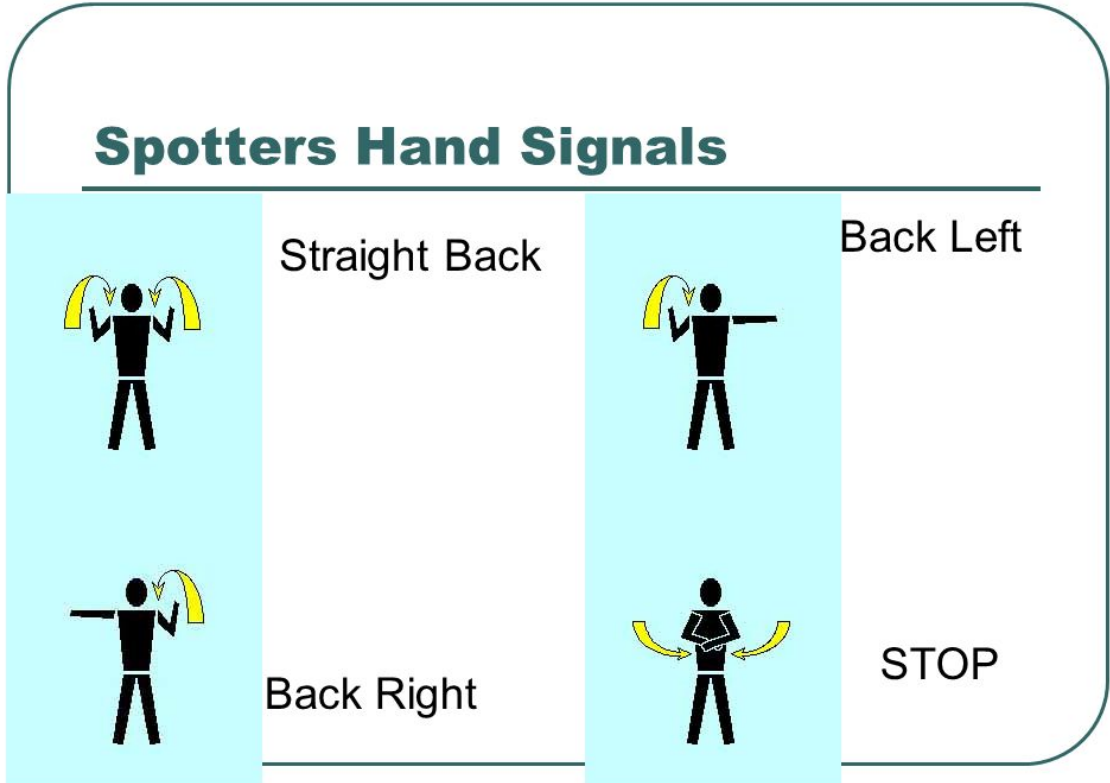
G. Spotter Responsibilities:

1. Spotters shall visualize both sides of the apparatus prior to backing up
2. Direct the driver while backing up or moving vehicle
3. Be aware of surroundings
4. Always look and listen
5. Stop oncoming hazards or vehicle backing up
6. Look for ground level and overhead obstructions

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- 7. Have visual contact with driver
- 8. Stay in line of sight with mirrors and shall never walk behind the vehicle while it is in motion
- 9. At night, stay in spot light/scene lighting or use a flash light
- H. The spotter(s) shall be on the ground, to the rear of the vehicle, and shall remain visible to the driver at all times. If the driver loses sight of the spotter(s) at any time, the driver shall immediately stop the vehicle.
- I. In no case are cameras or safety devices a substitute for a spotter.
- J. During night backing operations, signals will be the same. The spotter will ensure the spotlights on the rear of apparatus are turned on before allowing apparatus to be backed. A flash light may be carried, but at no time will it be directed toward the mirror.
- K. In order to prevent vehicle crashes and injuries, a standard set of hand signals shall be used. The following signals shall be used by the primary spotter while devoting strict attention to the movement of the vehicle. The primary spotter will be stationed on the driver's side rear of the vehicle. The secondary spotter will be positioned to visualize potential hazards in the vehicles path.
- L. Hand Signals:
 - a. **Straight Back** - Two hands above the head with palms toward face, waving back.
 - b. **Turn** - Arm pointing in direction of travel, other arm waving back.
 - c. **Stop** - Both arms crossed and held in place with hands in fist. If necessary, the guide can verbalize "STOP" to get the driver's attention.

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XXI. LEGAL AUTHORITY

The Commonwealth of Virginia traffic laws include specific provisions for emergency vehicles, while they are engaged in emergency operations. The Fauquier County Fire Rescue rules, regulations, policies and procedures specify when and how these exceptions will be applied and maybe in some cases, more restrictive than state traffic laws.

The motor vehicle laws of Virginia 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 the applicable laws and regulations.

§46.2-920. Certain vehicles exempt from regulations in certain situations; exceptions and additional requirements.

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A. The driver of any emergency vehicle, when such vehicle is being used in the performance of public services, and when such vehicle is operated under emergency conditions, may, without subjecting himself to criminal prosecution:

1. Disregard speed limits, while having due regard for safety of persons and property;
2. Proceed past any steady or flashing red signal, traffic light, stop sign, or device indicating moving traffic shall stop if the speed of the vehicle is sufficiently reduced to enable it to pass a signal, traffic light, or device with due regard to the safety of persons and property;
3. Park or stop notwithstanding the other provisions of this chapter;
4. Disregard regulations governing a direction of movement of vehicles turning in specified directions so long as the operator does not endanger life or property;
5. Pass or overtake, with due regard to the safety of persons and property, another vehicle at any intersection;
6. Pass or overtake with due regard to the safety of persons and property, while en route to an emergency, stopped or slow-moving vehicles, by going to the left of the stopped or slow-moving vehicle either in a no-passing zone or by crossing the highway centerline; or
7. Pass or overtake with due regard to the safety of persons and property, while en route to an emergency, stopped or slow-moving vehicles, by going off the paved or main traveled portion of the roadway on the right. Notwithstanding other provisions of this section, vehicles exempted in this instance will not be required to sound a siren or any device to give automatically intermittent signals.

B. The exemptions granted to emergency vehicles by subsection A of this section shall apply only when the operator of such vehicle displays a flashing, blinking, or alternating emergency light or lights as provided in §§ [46.2-1022](#) and [46.2-1023](#) and sounds a siren, exhaust whistle, or air horn designed to give automatically intermittent signals, as may be reasonably necessary, and, only when there is in force and effect for such vehicle either (i) standard motor vehicle liability insurance covering injury or death to any person in the sum of at least \$100,000 because of bodily injury to or death of one person in any one accident and, subject to the limit for one person, to a limit of \$300,000 because of bodily injury to or death of two or more persons in any one accident, and to a limit of \$20,000 because of injury to or destruction of property of others in any one accident or (ii)

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a certificate of self-insurance issued pursuant to § [46.2-368](#). Such exemptions shall not, however, protect the operator of any such vehicle from criminal prosecution for conduct constituting reckless disregard of the safety of persons and property. Nothing in this section shall release the operator of any such vehicle from civil liability for failure to use reasonable care in such operation.”

§ 46.2-1078.1. *Use of handheld personal communications devices in certain motor vehicles; exceptions; penalty.*

A. It is unlawful for any person to operate a moving motor vehicle on the highways in the Commonwealth while using any handheld personal communications device to:

1. Manually enter multiple letters or text in the device as a means of communicating with another person; or
2. Read any email or text message transmitted to the device or stored within the device, provided that this prohibition shall not apply to any name or number stored within the device nor to any caller identification information.

B. The provisions of this section shall not apply to:

1. The operator of any emergency vehicle while he is engaged in the performance of his official duties;
2. An operator who is lawfully parked or stopped;
3. The use of factory-installed or aftermarket global positioning systems (GPS) or wireless communications devices used to transmit or receive data as part of a digital dispatch system; or
4. Any person using a handheld personal communications device to report an emergency.

C. A violation of this section is a traffic infraction punishable, for a first offense, by a fine of \$125 and, for a second or subsequent offense, by a fine of \$250.

For the purposes of this section, "emergency vehicle" means:

1. Any law-enforcement vehicle operated by or under the direction of a federal, state, or local law-enforcement officer;

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2. Any regional detention center vehicle operated by or under the direction of a correctional officer responding to an emergency call or operating in an emergency situation;
3. Any vehicle used to fight fire, including publicly owned state forest warden vehicles, when traveling in response to a fire alarm or emergency call;
4. Any emergency medical services vehicle designed or used for the principal purpose of emergency medical services where human life is endangered;
5. Any Department of Emergency Management vehicle or Office of Emergency Medical Services vehicle, when responding to an emergency call or operating in an emergency situation;
6. Any Department of Corrections vehicle designated by the Director of the Department of Corrections, when (i) responding to an emergency call at a correctional facility, (ii) participating in a drug-related investigation, (iii) pursuing escapees from a correctional facility, or (iv) responding to a request for assistance from a law-enforcement officer; and
7. Any vehicle authorized to be equipped with alternating, blinking, or flashing red or red and white secondary warning lights pursuant to § [46.2-1029.2](#).

D. Distracted driving shall be included as a part of the driver's license knowledge examination.

2009, c. [661](#); 2013, cc. [752](#), [790](#); 2014, cc. [77](#), [803](#); 2015, cc. [502](#), [503](#).