

Rep. Loudenbeck: Bill heads to Governor's desk

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Madison- Today, the Wisconsin State Assembly passed Assembly Bill 297, authored by Representative Amy Loudenbeck (R-Clinton). The bill passed the Senate on October 20th, it now heads to Governor Evers to be signed into law.

“As a former volunteer firefighter and the wife of a career firefighter/paramedic, I am proud to coauthor Assembly Bill 297, which is intended to protect first responders from unnecessary and preventable danger by creating an emergency response area, similar to a work zone. In this emergency response area, just like in a work zone, fines would double for speeding, reckless driving, and other traffic citations, and drivers may not use a cell phone while driving in an emergency response area,” said Loudenbeck.

Assembly Bill 297 includes the following provisions:

- Creates an emergency or roadside response area, similar to a construction work zone. The bill defines “emergency or roadside response area” as the section of roadway within 500 feet of emergency vehicles.
- Fines would double for speeding, reckless driving, and other traffic citations in an emergency roadside response area, just as they do for specified traffic violations in a construction work zone.
- Drivers may not use a handheld cell phone while driving in an emergency response or roadside area and may be subject to a forfeiture of not less than \$20 or more than \$40 for a first offense, and not less than \$50 or more than \$100 for a second offense.
- If a driver causes bodily harm to workers engaged in highway maintenance, construction, utility work, emergency response, or roadside response, they may be fined up to \$10,000 or jailed for 9 months, or both.

- Requires the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to create an awareness campaign to make drivers aware of these changes and the risks associated with not moving over, reducing speed, and putting away your cell phone in an emergency response area.

“Tragically, collisions with emergency or roadside response vehicles or workers responding to an emergency due to distracted and reckless driving are not uncommon. Sometimes these collisions result in injury or death, with only minor repercussions for the driver,” said Loudenberg. “We heard tragic stories from first responders while working on this bill, and I’m looking forward to it becoming law to help alleviate preventable risks, by holding motorists to the same standards in an emergency response area as they would in a work zone.”