

Rep. Loudenbeck: Two Loudenbeck first responder bills signed into law

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Madison- Governor Tony Evers has signed two bills authored by Rep. Amy Loudenbeck (R-Clinton) into law. Senate Bill 374 was signed on Friday, December 3rd and became 2021 Act 104. Assembly Bill 297 was signed today and became 2021 Act 115.

2021 Act 104 makes necessary statutory changes to ensure Wisconsin's specialized emergency response teams, the Statewide Urban Search and Rescue Task Force and the Regional Hazardous Materials Response Teams, are maintained and the individuals serving on them are protected.

The Urban Search and Rescue Team was originally formed in 2005. They specialize in hazard mitigation, search and rescue, and incident stabilization. The team is capable of responding to state and national disasters including earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods and terrorist events. Regional Hazardous Materials Response Teams have been in existence since 1995 and may be activated for an incident involving a hazardous materials spill, leak, explosion, injury or the potential of immediate threat to life, the environment, or property.

“Act 104 expands the scope of emergencies the Urban Search and Rescue Task Force can respond to including emergencies like collapse, trench, high angle and swift water rescues. It also streamlines the reimbursement schedule for team deployments, and makes changes to contributions for duty disability for the team members. These changes address concerns brought forward from Fire Chiefs of the participating municipalities.” said Loudenbeck.

2021 Act 115 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.

“As a former volunteer firefighter and the wife of a career firefighter/paramedic, I am thankful to see this bill become law. It will 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 Loudenberg.