

# WisDOT: November Law of the Month: Emergency responder safety

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Emergency responders put their community first every day. Those who work on our highways directing traffic, providing critical care, or making repairs are risking their lives to ensure all travelers are safe on the roads.

Since 2017, preliminary data shows 377 first responders have been hurt and eight were killed while working in an emergency vehicle or at a crash scene.

A crash scene can turn dangerous quickly for law enforcement, EMS, or fire crews, because of the risk of secondary crashes. There are almost 800 secondary crashes in Wisconsin every year that happen when other drivers are not paying attention to the scene or backups and cause another crash.

Many of those crashes could have been prevented if drivers had slowed down and stayed alert around crash response scenes.

“When emergency responders are on scene, their focus is on helping the injured, removing vehicles, and investigating what happened,” Wisconsin State Patrol Superintendent Tim Carnahan said. “We are at higher risk because we have to divert our attention elsewhere, so we’re really counting on drivers to slow down, pay attention and move over if they can, and make sure to keep us safe while we’re keeping them safe.”

Gov. Tony Evers signed a [new state law](#) last year to improve protections for first responders and reduce distracted driving.

The law:

- Bans handheld cell phone use while passing through an emergency or

roadside response area, except to report an emergency

- Doubles fines for certain violations that lead to injury in an emergency response area
- Protect workers in construction, maintenance, and utility work areas

This law is in addition to the state's [Move Over law](#) that requires drivers to move over, or slow down if that's not possible, when passing a vehicle with its warning lights flashing.

"We are grateful for these protections for the nearly 40,000 first responders who are working every day to keep everyone safe on the roads in Wisconsin. Every time we step out onto the side of a highway, we put our lives at risk to help others. It's important that we all do our part to protect those who work to keep us safe," Superintendent Carnahan said.

Emergency responder safety is Wisconsin State Patrol's November Law of the Month to coincide with Crash Responder Safety Week. The awareness week, from November 14-18, 2022, is a nationwide initiative to recognize the role of first responders in a traffic incident.

View the Law of the Month video and news release

online: <https://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/about-wisdot/newsroom/law/lom.aspx>