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## Reminder to drivers: yield the right-of-way to emergency vehicles

By Vera Kochan

Code 3 may not mean much to the average driver, but to emergency responders, it's a term commonly used to mean "proceed immediately with lights and siren."

During the recent Memorial Day weekend police chase of three Moraga Arco robbery suspects, two civilian vehicles in Lafayette did not pull to the right while Lafayette Police were in pursuit, but rather blocked the road by coming to a complete stop where they were. Moraga Police Det. Kevin Mooney said if LPD had not been able to make strategic vehicle maneuvers to continue the pursuit, the suspects would have gotten away.

Mooney reminds drivers, "Move out of the way when lights are flashing. Get to the side of the road."

The Department of Motor Vehicles handbook has a section entitled "Sharing the Road" with a category involving emergency vehicles. Anyone who has a driver's license should not be surprised that "you must yield the right-of-way to any police vehicle, fire engine, ambulance or other emergency vehicle using a siren and red lights. Drive to the right edge of the road and stop until the emergency vehicle(s) have passed." DMV makes note to never stop in an intersection, however. If you are in an intersection when you see an emergency vehicle, you should continue through and get to the right as soon as it is safe and stop. "Emergency vehicles often use the wrong side of the street to continue on their way," the handbook states. "They sometimes use a loudspeaker to talk to drivers blocking their path."

Moraga Police Chief Jon King confirms that time and again some drivers are not following handbook protocol. Ironically, some drivers are so attuned to the rules of the road that they do not obey directions given by emergency responders if those directions conflict with existing laws, signs or signals. Also, following an emergency vehicle to the scene of a response for the purposes of casual observation could get you arrested for interfering with those services. Riding within 300 feet of an emergency vehicle's coattails, as a means of cutting through traffic, is also against the law.

Moraga-Orinda Fire District Battalion Chief Matt Nichols said, "I understand that a lot of times people don't hear the sirens, because their radio is too loud or they're talking on the phone, but if you see two or three cars ahead of you pulling over look in your mirrors to see if an emergency vehicle is approaching. Cars in front or behind you may hear the sirens louder because of the Doppler effect." This depends on the proximity between you and the emergency vehicle.

MOFD Capt. Jacob Airola stated, "As emergency vehicles approach, use your blinkers to indicate which direction you are heading. This helps us determine which way you're going to go."

First responders risk their lives to protect the public. Sadly, many have died or have been injured in the line of duty while working during roadside emergencies. In 2000, the U.S. Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration originated move over laws. These laws require drivers to give a one lane buffer to stopped emergency vehicles. For example, while driving in the right lane if the driver sees a stopped emergency vehicle that driver is required to move one lane over to the left to give enough buffer space, thereby avoiding a potential accident. If moving over one lane is not possible, the driver should slow down to a safe speed. "If drivers don't give us enough space we can close down an additional lane," Airola said. This would create more congestion, especially on freeways.

Airola also cautions drivers not to rubberneck when passing the scene of an accident. "This momentary distraction by drivers can and often does cause a secondary accident," he said. "We are aware that our presence impacts your driving situation and do our best to get things done as quickly as possible. In order to do that we would appreciate your cooperation."

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