



Emergency Vehicles - Safety

Dear Reader:

The following document was created from the MTAS website ([mtas.tennessee.edu](https://www.mtas.tennessee.edu)). This website is maintained daily by MTAS staff and seeks to represent the most current information regarding issues relative to Tennessee municipal government.

We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with municipal government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other MTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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Emergency Vehicles - Safety

Reference Number: MTAS-848

Equipment on Emergency Vehicles

Every police and fire department vehicle must have a bell, siren, or exhaust whistle approved by the state Department of Safety or local police authorities. T.C.A. § 55-9-201. Blue flashing lights may be used only by full-time, salaried, law enforcement officers except in Knox County where reserve and auxiliary officers who are in uniform and operating a police vehicle may use them in conjunction with red flashing lights. T.C.A. § 55-9-414.

Authorized Emergency Vehicles

Rescue and emergency response vehicles owned by a state-chartered rescue squad, emergency lifesaving crew, or active unit of the Tennessee Association of Rescue Squads are included in the definition of "authorized emergency vehicle." T.C.A. § 55-8-101(2)(C)(ii).

Highway Safety Programs

Tennessee municipalities are authorized to carry out highway safety programs within their jurisdictions. These programs must be approved by the governor and must be in accordance with the secretary of commerce's uniform standards contained in provisions of the Federal Highway Safety Act of 1966. T.C.A. § 55-20-101.

Engine Compression Brakes ("Jake Brakes")

A municipality may implement a state law within the municipality that requires truck tractors and semitrailers that use engine compression brakes to have an approved muffler (any muffler that complies with Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations on noise emissions compiled in 49 C.F.R., 325.1, *et seq.*) by requesting the state Department of Transportation to place signs. The municipality must pay for the signs. T.C.A. § 55-7-117.

Regulation of Electrical Personal Assistive Mobility Devices (EPAMDs)

Municipalities may reasonably regulate but not generally prohibit EPAMDs. The use of EPAMDs may be restricted or excluded in certain areas in the interest of public safety or the preservation of natural areas, but only to the extent that bicycles are restricted or excluded. Users must obey speed limits and yield to pedestrians and human-powered devices. EPAMDs are not considered motor vehicles under state law, so registration and licensing requirements do not apply. The device or the operator must be equipped with reflectors and lights when the device is operated one-half hour before and after sunset and one-half hour before sunrise. T.C.A. §§ 55-53-101, *et seq.*

Regulation of Low-speed and Medium-speed Vehicles

Municipalities may prohibit the operation of low-speed or medium-speed vehicles on any street in their jurisdiction in the interest of public safety. A "low-speed vehicle" is any four-wheeled electric or gas vehicle, except golf carts, whose top speed is 25 mph or less but greater than 20 mph (medium speed is greater than 30 mph but not more than 35 mph). Low-speed vehicles may be operated only on streets with a posted speed limit of 35 mph or slower and medium speed only on streets of 40 mph or lower. Operators must possess a Class D driver's license. T.C.A. §§ 55-1-122, 55-8-101, 191.

DISCLAIMER: The letters and publications written by the MTAS consultants were written based upon the law at the time and/or a specific sets of facts. The laws referenced in the letters and publications may have changed and/or the technical advice provided may not be applicable to your city or circumstances. Always consult with your city attorney or an MTAS consultant before taking any action based on information contained in this website.

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