

PA FIRE POLICE

Law Governing RED and Blue Lights

By Tony Riccardi - PA State Fire Academy Approved Fire Police Instructor

This month we will tackle one of the most controversial subjects in the fire industry, red and/or blue lights.

Unfortunately, there are many abuses and violations occurring with both red and blue lights and it is doubtful if this article will change that but, hopefully fire police officers will realize they can't break the law or interpret it to suit themselves.

Our society has become so inundated with so many lights, many motorists fail to yield the right of way to emergency responders, but that does not justify breaking the law because someone else is a violator.

PA Vehicle Code Section 4751 authorizes a fire chief and an assistant to place red lights on their personal vehicles along with an audible signal (it does not say siren). In addition, a fire police captain and a lieutenant may also equip their personal vehicles with red lights and an audible signal. Notice the authorization is in the singular; thus only one captain and one lieutenant can operate with red lights. All others must run on blue on their POVs. (Privately Owned Vehicles)

If an organization has more than one lieutenant, this is handled by identifying them as first lieutenant, second lieutenant, and so on. The first lieutenant is the only one permitted to equip their POV with a red light, all others must use blue.

Some fire police captains and lieutenants insist that the law says that they may equip their personal vehicles with a combination of red and blue lights. However, the attorney for Penn Dot, who wrote the law, stated that this only applies to a vehicle owned by the fire department and assigned to the fire police as a traffic unit.

- But, let's put this matter to rest once and for all by examining Section 6106 of Title 75, PA Vehicle Code which states:

- The PSP may designate any vehicle or group of vehicles as emergency vehicles upon

The Fire Police Assoc. Of Berks County Will Host Following Training Class

On Saturday and Sunday, November 10 and 11, 2012 beginning at 0800 each day The Fire Police Association of Berks County will host at No Charge, The Fire Police Course "**Legal Concepts for Fire Police**"

The Instructor will be Tony Riccardi.

The class will be held at Berks County Fire Training Center, 895 Morgantown Road (Route 10) Reading, PA 19607.

Information and Registration:

Dave Bossard, First Vice President and Training Director: 610-698-4653

Email: jdavidbossard@aol.com

Don Bailey, President, 484-955-2043

Email: dlbaileyjr@comcast.net

Driving Directions: Google Berks County Fire Training Center

a finding that the designation is necessary to the preservation of life or property or to the execution of emergency governmental functions.

- (a.1) Exception – Vehicles designated as emergency vehicles under this section shall not display or be equipped with a combination of red and blue lights.

Thus you can see that no one other than a police cruiser and a fire company owned vehicles assigned to the fire police may equip their vehicles with a combination of red and blue lights.

The notion that red and blue lights will get you to the scene faster is just simply not true.

Section 4572 – Authorized Lights

This section of the vehicle code covers blue and yellow lights which certain personal vehicles may be equipped.

Generally, a firefighter, fire police officer and EMS personnel, if authorized by their respective

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chief officer, may equip their personal vehicle with a blue light.

Under this section, a vehicle so equipped has no additional rights that other motorists do not have with the exception that, if other motorists observe the activated blue light and yields the right of way, the vehicle with the blue light may observe the courtesy and move past the vehicle.

When the blue light is activated, you may not speed, may not drive through a stop sign without first stopping and may never proceed through a light showing red for your direction of travel. In other words, the only things you can do with a blue light is turn it on and off, there is nothing else to discuss. Why then do so many emergency responders violate this law?

The law also requires that any color light must be mounted on the vehicle so that a full 360 degree visibility is available to all other drivers. This means that lights mounted on a dash are illegal. "Well a cop saw my light and didn't say anything" goes the comment from red/blue light violators. Yes, I'm sure the police officer didn't say anything but, that does not mean he is saying you are legal! He, obviously, does not want to cite an emergency responder. You show a great deal of disrespect for the police officer when you continue to flagrantly violate the law.

Another provision in the law is that the yellow arrow stick (Traffic Control Emergency Directional Light Assembly) may never be used on a vehicle equipped with a blue light. Obviously, this offends many fire police officers who prefer to use this device. Some want to know if they can at least place it on their vehicle once they arrive at the scene. The law states that a vehicle with a blue light is not an emergency vehicle; therefore, they cannot EQUIP their vehicle with the yellow arrow stick. So, no, you cannot use the yellow arrow stick on a vehicle with a blue light under any circumstances.

The fire chief and the ambulance chief are required to submit, each year, to their nearest Pennsylvania State Police substation, a list of those members who have been authorized to

equip their POV with a blue light.

- (1) In order to be able to display lights on their vehicles under this subsection, the names of ambulance personnel, and volunteer firefighters shall be submitted to the nearest station of the Pennsylvania State Police on a list signed by the chief of the ambulance or fire department or company and each dog handler shall register at the nearest Pennsylvania State Police Station.

There have been instances where fire police officers as well as firefighters were told their vehicle was illegal due to requirements of the law. Their comment, "I guess I better change it, but never do. Proving that we will do what we want to regardless of the law.

As everyone knows, fire police officers are often subjected to verbal abuse and disobedience to their orders, in addition, some are even held in low regard by their own fire companies. When fire police officers disregard the law and equip their vehicles illegally or, abuse them when they operate these lights, the public image being displayed is not very helpful in improving the image of Special Fire Police Officers.

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