

# Knowing how to respond to emergency vehicles helps make all safer

*That, and other common-sense safety practices can reduce the “relative risks” that come with driving*

I had been trying to write a column about “relative risk,” but hadn’t been able to really put it together in the way I thought would make the most sense to you, the reader. The term “relative” itself implies that any subsequent definition is a bit of a moving target (no pun intended).

Confused yet? Well, a little incident en route to a Boxing Day dinner gave me (unfortunately) just the example I was looking for. And when I really thought about it, I realized that it was going to take more than one column to cover it all off. So, here is part one of two.

Back to Boxing Day.

There we were, sitting patiently in the left turn lane, waiting for the green light so we could wait another five seconds to allow for the red light runners and then proceed. Don’t get me wrong, I refuse to surrender my fight against red light runners, but in the meantime one does have to be careful in order to live to fight another day, right?



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Anyway, off in the distance, an approaching siren could be heard.

## Do the right thing

OK, here’s the drill. Odds are pretty good that at least once in your driving career you are going to be confronted with an approaching emergency vehicle. And since that emergency vehicle could quite possibly make the difference in a life or death situation, it’s vitally important that you do the right thing and get out of the way so the personnel can get there and do their thing.

So, what do you do? Besides the obvious, you scoff?

Well, I thought it was pretty obvious myself until I watched the drivers at the

corner of Waverley and Bishop Grandin that night.

For those of you unfamiliar with this intersection, there are two lanes going in all four directions, and multiple left turn lanes just to confuse the issue a bit more. And, there is usually a fair bit of traffic moving every which way.

Which continued to move every which way as the fireman behind the wheel was forced to slam on his brakes and skid through the intersection!!

I couldn’t believe it! A couple of vehicles pulled over, and some drivers sort of “froze in the headlights” and didn’t move, thinking that was the appropriate thing to do. But what really got to me were the two or three vehicles that actually raced the fire truck through the intersection.

I can’t even guess what could have been so important that these maniacs endangered not only themselves and the firefighters, but also the victims,

wherever they were, of the actual emergency.

## Yield the right of way

So, for the benefit of all emergency vehicle drivers out there, who face this kind of deadly driving behaviour every time they answer a call, here’s a refresher on what to do when approached by an emergency vehicle.

As soon as you hear the siren, listen to determine which direction the vehicle is coming from, and immediately yield the right of way.

Generally, the safest and easiest way to do this is to pull over to the right. If you are stopped at a red light or stop sign and wind up blocking the emergency vehicle, then you may have to proceed through the intersection — with extreme caution—in order to clear the path.

Then, once you are safely out of the way, do not move forward until the vehicle has passed. It’s a good idea to double check your mirrors and make

sure a second emergency vehicle isn’t coming through as well.

Don’t try to beat the vehicle through a light. Doing so is taking too high of a “relative risk.” That’s what this column is leading in to. Why is it that drivers, knowing they are running a risk, do it anyway? I’m not talking about the obvious stuff like speeding and impaired driving. I’m talking about the more subtle things like racing ambulances, or pulling out in front of a car you know is approaching too quickly.

And that’s what we’ll continue talking about next week. Until then, be **RoadWise**.

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