

It's a no-brainer: give emergency vehicles the right of way

Sirens are cue to cool your jets for a few minutes, co-operate with other motorists to help emergency crew get by safely

Based on the absolutely surreal driving experience I had this week, I think it's time to revisit what we know about driving around emergency vehicles. I'm talking specifically about what to do when confronted by an emergency vehicle in full lights and sirens mode.

Picture this: I was sitting one row of vehicles back from the lights on McGillivray Boulevard waiting to cross Kenaston. For those of you blessed with not having dealt with this intersection, it's a main set of lights on an extremely busy thoroughfare in Winnipeg. I was in the middle lane of three. The light had just turned red for traffic moving across Kenaston (like me), so we were all looking forward to a good 10 minute wait (OK, it feels that long) before we got the green again. Meanwhile, traffic was now flying, and I do mean flying, along Kenaston.

Suddenly I heard sirens. We (myself and the decent citizens in front of and



**Road
Wise**

**Paul
Allen**

beside me) started cranking our necks around to figure out where they were coming from. Turns out—and this is the first time this has ever happened to me—it was a police car and an ambulance coming up behind us on McGillivray. They wanted to make a left onto Kenaston. But there were two rows of vehicles ahead of them, all stopped and waiting on a red light.

Inching ahead

So, we all started trying to inch ahead into the intersection far enough to make room to allow the emergency vehicles to squeeze through. The drivers in front of me, of course, were trusting the motorists zooming down Kenaston to

slow down or move to the right or otherwise do something to accommodate the emergency situation at the intersection.

How naïve. I've never felt so frustrated, and judging by my rear view mirror reflection, the police officers banging their hands on the dashboard hadn't either.

Thanks to the obliviousness of the drivers on Kenaston, there was no way we could move ahead to let the cop and the ambulance driver through. If one of the vehicles in front of me had even tried to cross into the intersection, they would have been creamed. It ended up the emergency vehicles had to wait for the green light before they could proceed.

So, here's the lesson: pay attention to all emergency vehicles. The ones to the left and the right of you require your compliance to allow them through just as much as the one in front or behind

you requires you to pull over.

Here's what to do: as soon as you hear the siren, listen and determine which direction the vehicle is coming from. Once you've got that figured out, you must immediately yield the right of way.

Pull over to the right

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. Might I add: other drivers moving through the intersection should have their wits about them enough to slow down or stop to allow you to do this!

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.

This same week a fire truck approached me from behind. I was really disappointed to note how many drivers in front of or behind me made no attempt to move to the right. One road warrior seized the moment and actually accelerated past those of us that did. The fire truck had to change lanes to get around this guy, if you can believe it.

This isn't a game. It's not going to kill you to slow down or move over. But not doing so could very well mean the difference between life and death for the individual waiting for that ambulance or fire truck.

That's it for this week. Until next week, be **RoadWise**.

Paul Allen is Road Safety Manager for Manitoba Public Insurance. He would like to hear from you. His e-mail address is pallen@mpi.mb.ca and his mailing address is Room 824, 234 Donald Street, Box 6300, Winnipeg, MB R3C 4A4.

Visit MPI's Web site at www.mpi.mb.ca