



Risk Management Solutions



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Heat-Related Safety in Alabama

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Alabama, a state known for its hot and humid summers, can experience extreme temperatures that pose serious health risks. Heat-related illnesses can be life-threatening, making heat safety a crucial consideration for residents, visitors and municipal employees alike. In this article, we will highlight the importance of heat safety in Alabama and provide essential tips for protecting yourself and others during the sweltering summers.

Heat-related illnesses, such as heat exhaustion and heat stroke, occur when the body's internal temperature rises to dangerous levels. Factors such as high temperatures, humidity, prolonged sun exposure and physical activity can increase the risk of heat-related illnesses, especially during Alabama's hot summers. These conditions can be particularly dangerous for vulnerable populations, including the elderly, children, pregnant women and individuals with chronic health conditions.

One of the key factors in heat safety is understanding the signs and symptoms of heat-related illnesses. Heat exhaustion can cause symptoms such as heavy sweating, weakness, dizziness, nausea, headache and muscle cramps. If left untreated, it can progress to heat stroke, which is a life-threatening condition. Heat stroke symptoms include high body temperature (above 103°F), hot and dry skin, rapid heartbeat, confusion and loss of consciousness. If you or someone around you experiences these symptoms, it is critical to seek immediate medical attention.

To protect yourself and others from heat-related illnesses in Alabama, it is crucial to follow these heat safety tips:

- **Stay hydrated:** Drink plenty of water throughout the day, even if you do not feel thirsty. Avoid alcohol, caffeine and sugary drinks, as they contribute to dehydration. If you are engaging in outdoor activities or exercise, drink water before, during and after the activity to stay hydrated.
- **Dress appropriately:** Wear loose, light-colored and lightweight clothing that allows your skin to breathe. Avoid dark-colored clothing, as they can absorb more heat. Protect your face and head with a wide-brimmed hat and wear sunglasses to protect your eyes from harmful UV rays.
- **Seek shade:** When possible, stay in shaded areas, especially during the hottest parts of the day, typically between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. If you must be outside, take regular breaks in shaded areas to give your body a chance to cool down.
- **Use sunscreen:** Apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen with a high SPF (sun protection factor) to protect your skin from the harmful effects of UV rays. Reapply sunscreen every two hours, or more often, if you are sweating or swimming.
- **Use fans or air conditioning:** Stay in air-conditioned buildings, if possible, or use fans to circulate air and help your body cool down. If you do not have access to air conditioning or a fan on the job site, visit air-conditioned public places during the hottest parts of the day when feasible.
- **Be mindful of outdoor activities:** Limit outdoor activities during the hottest parts of the day, and schedule outdoor activities, such as exercise or yard work, during cooler times, like early morning or late evening.
- **Consideration should be taken for vulnerable populations:** Keep a close eye on children, elderly individuals, pregnant women and individuals with chronic health conditions while outside during hot weather. Make sure they are staying hydrated and taking necessary precautions to stay safe in the heat.

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Emergency Driving: A Refresher for First Responders

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The Code of Alabama 1975 defines what an emergency vehicle is, what the driver can do, and when and under what circumstances. It is important that you know and understand what the law says and what your department policy says, and not exceed their limitations (NOTE: department policy may further define the restrictions of state law, and except as defined in the Code, you are required to obey all traffic laws like every other driver).

Title 32-1-1.1 defines an authorized emergency vehicle as *fire department vehicles, police vehicles and ambulances as are publicly owned, and such other publicly or privately-owned vehicles as are designated by the director of public safety or the chief of police of an incorporated city*. This definition does not include privately owned vehicles driven by a local reserve officer or volunteer fireman, unless their vehicle is designated as stated.

Title 32-5a-7, Section A states: *The driver of an authorized emergency vehicle, when responding to an emergency call or when in the pursuit of an actual or suspected violator of the law or when responding to but not upon returning from a fire alarm, may exercise the privileges set forth in this section, but subject to the conditions herein stated.* The law spells out three, and only three exceptions, for emergency vehicles.

The first is *when responding to an emergency call*. Generally, an emergency is where life, limb, or property is in peril AND your arrival on the scene in a timely manner can mitigate the situation. We all have a pretty good idea of what an emergency is, but if we are not careful, we quit acting on what we know we should do and our only focus is to get there fast. However, what happens if you crash along the way, and it is later determined it was not an emergency or the emergency was over?

The second is *when in the pursuit of an actual or suspected violator*. Hopefully, your department policy further defines what, when, where, how and why a pursuit occurs. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Alabama is listed as No. 1 in the U.S. for having the most pursuit-related fatalities per 100,000 residents from 1996-2015. As a result, many agencies have instituted policies that restrict pursuits to more serious violations, such as custodial arrest situations only. It is critical that you evaluate what led to the pursuit, the seriousness of the offense, considerations such as weather, time of day, your own driving experience and ability, familiarity with the area, and if there are other options available to identify or capture the suspect. The bottom line is pursuits are dangerous – know the law, know your policy, weigh the risk versus the gain, and if circumstances and safety dictate, terminate the pursuit.

The final exception is *when responding to, but not upon returning from, a fire alarm*. Firefighters seemingly always use their lights and siren when in emergency response mode but seldom get to extreme speeds. Of course, driving a 40 to 50-foot fire truck weighed down with a few tons of water or equipment probably has a lot to do with that.

So, if any one of the three exceptions are in play, what can you do? Section B states: **The driver of an authorized emergency vehicle may:**

- 1. Park or stand, irrespective of the provisions of this chapter.** This simply means you can park in the road, no parking zones, or other prohibited places as needed.
- 2. Proceed past a red or stop signal or stop sign, but only after slowing down as may be necessary for safe operation.** Nearly 40% of all traffic crashes, and 25% of all traffic fatalities occur in intersections. If you add emergency driving to that scenario it becomes even more so. Slow down, properly clear the intersection – remember everyone cannot see your lights, hear your siren, or even realize that you are in the area.
- 3. Exceed the maximum speed limits so long as the driver does not endanger life or property.** This says that you can speed, but it also says so long as you do not endanger life or property. So how fast is that? The Code is silent to that question; 75 mph downtown is probably not ok, 100 mph on the interstate might be. Use common sense and good judgement.
- 4. Disregard regulations governing direction of movement or turning in specified directions.** This could allow you to go the wrong way on a one-way, make U-turns, make left or right turns where prohibited, and so on.

To carry out any of these actions you must also comply with Section C, which says: *The exemptions herein granted to an authorized emergency vehicle shall apply only when such vehicle is making use of an **audible signal** meeting the requirements of Section 32-5-213 and **visual requirements** of any laws of this state requiring visual signals on emergency vehicles.* Nowhere does it say lights only – but for whatever reason, we turn our lights on but not our siren. There are lots of excuses for not using our siren, but the law requires it if you are going to do any of the actions listed above.

Lastly, Section D states: *The foregoing provisions shall not relieve the driver of an authorized emergency vehicle from the duty to drive with **due regard for the safety of all persons**, nor shall such provisions protect the driver from **the consequences of his or her reckless disregard for the safety of others**.*

Due regard is just what it says – you are giving the situation the regard or respect it is due. You are acting as a reasonable person would in the same situation. Again, you are doing what you are supposed to in the manner you are supposed to do it. Note that it says for the safety of all persons – not just you, but all persons, which could include the person you are pursuing. Secondly, it says you are not protected from the consequences of reckless disregard for the safety of others, which simply means that if you were aware or should have been aware of a substantial and unjustifiable risk, you are not protected.

To access sample police policies on emergency/non-emergency vehicle response and vehicle pursuits, go to: www.losscontrol.org and click on “Reference Documents.” In the search field, type PSOP. ■



IMPORTANT NOTICE: Changes to How You Get Your Loss Control Reports!

The Loss Control Division is continually reviewing and evaluating the risk management services and resources it provides to members of the Municipal Workers Compensation Fund (MWCF) and the Alabama Municipal Insurance Corporation (AMIC), and that includes **HOW** those services and resources are delivered.

To that end, we are making a significant change to how your loss control reports, letters and response forms will be delivered to you. Effective immediately, we will no longer be mailing you a paper copy of any reports and letters from your Loss Control representatives after they have visited you, but instead you will be receiving the same great feedback via email. This will allow for faster notifications and electronic record keeping.

Please note that these emails will normally be sent from our in-office Loss Control support staff, Donna Wagner or Sonya McCarley. To ensure you receive your reports, please make sure to add the following email addresses to your "safe sender" list.

Donna Wagner dwagner@almonline.org | **Sonya McCarley** smccarley@almonline.org

If you need assistance adding these emails to your "safe sender" list, please contact your IT department or your email provider for further help.

If you have any additional questions, or you need to update the email we have on file for you, please contact Sonya McCarley at smccarley@almonline.org or (334) 386-8114.



Congratulations, Cody!

We are proud to recognize Cody Marcum for obtaining his Associate in Risk Management (ARM) certification from The Institutes Risk and Insurance Knowledge Group! The ARM program focuses on risk assessment, risk management and risk financing. The designation typically takes about a year to complete, but Cody studied hard and was able to successfully pass all of the requirements in four months.

Cody began working for the Alabama Municipal Insurance Corporation and Municipal Workers Compensation Fund Loss Control Division in October 2022. Before joining the Loss Control Division, he worked eight years within the fire service, earning the rank of apparatus operator. Cody holds various IFSAC and Pro Board certifications, which include fire inspections, hazardous materials technician and rescue technician. Additionally, Cody served in the United States Marine Corps from 2010-2018.

Cody said, "The ARM designation provides the foundation for an ever-evolving field of risk management, and I look forward to pursuing additional educational opportunities in the future." ■

Heat-Related Safety continued

Additional precautions should be taken for municipal employees that are required to work outdoors for extended periods, such as parks and recreation, street, and public works departments to name a few.

Here are some recommendations:

- Supervisors should monitor the weather daily and adjust work schedules or duties accordingly to ensure employee safety.
- Implement the Rule of 20 Percent, when necessary, to build heat tolerance. New or inexperienced workers should work only 20 percent of the normal duration on their first day of work to allow workers to acclimatize to the heat. Then, the work duration should be increased by 20 percent each subsequent day until the worker is performing on a normal schedule. Please note that some employees may need more time, during this build-up period, to acclimatize. Activities during this period should perform tasks that are similar in intensity to the demands of their job. Furthermore, additional rest periods will be needed to recover from the increased heat load.
- Create a rehabilitation cooler that is used for heat-related illnesses only. This cooler should have ice, water and rags/hand towels to use for rapid cooling in the event of an emergency. The rags/hand towels should be single use only to prevent contamination. The placement of these rags should be limited to the head, neck, underarms and wrists.

In conclusion, heat safety is of utmost importance in Alabama, especially during the hot and humid summers we encounter. By following these heat safety tips, you can protect yourself and others from the risks of heat-related illnesses and enjoy the summer season in Alabama safely. Stay cool, stay hydrated and stay safe! ■

2023 SKIDCAR Schedule

Through an advanced, computer-controlled driver training vehicle known as the SKIDCAR System, trainees learn how to react quickly and safely to a range of hazardous driving conditions. Training is conducted throughout the state at a minimal cost. If you would like to schedule or host a SKIDCAR session in your area, please contact **Donna Wagner** at (334) 386-8125.



August 8 - 18	Decatur	Sept. 26 - Oct. 13	Oneonta
September 5 - 15	Birmingham	Nov. 28 - Dec. 8	Lincoln

Register and pay online at www.losscontrol.org!



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