

FAQs - Red & Blue Light Laws

Our Fire Truck runs around with the yellow lights blinking on the back all the time. Is this legal?

No, and it's a dumb idea anyway. The amber bar is properly called a Traffic Control Emergency Directional Light Assembly (TCEDLA) and by definition it is to aid in traffic control. Also, flashing lights are only permitted to be activated when (1) going to the scene, (2) at the scene, and (3) in the interest of public safety. How is a fire truck, returning from a call or out to get gas endangering the public? The 500' back from the rear of a fire truck only applies when responding and on-scene. What it's actually doing, besides boosting the ego of the guys on the rig by saying "look at me, I'm here!" is that they're driving complacency to the motorists, who will tune out lights that don't mean anything. How fast do people pass by the police car parked in the construction zones? Real dumb idea, guys, and if cited, the fine's \$500 to \$1000. Explain that to the people who donate to your FD...

I'm a Fire Police Captain. Do I have to have a red light and siren?

First, there has to be minimum standards to become a Fire Police Captain or Lieutenant. Just because you come to the most calls does not qualify you to be an officer. The minimums should include Basic Fire Police, ICS-100, IS-700, current HazMat, EVOC, at least one Traffic Control class teaching the MUTCD, etc. If no one in the FD has these qualifications, then there is no Captain or Lieutenant.

Once selected to the position then, yes, one Captain and one Lieutenant from each Fire Company, if they use their privately-owned vehicle to answer emergency calls, are required to have red lights and a siren. It is not their choice, it is not the Fire Chief's choice, it is not the Police Department's choice, it is a requirement of law, under Section 4571 of the Vehicle Code, which states "Every emergency vehicle shall be equipped with one or more revolving or flashing red lights and an audible warning system...". When used in the Vehicle Code, shall is an absolute mandate, not a choice.

Why can't I put hide-away strobes in my vehicle?

It doesn't matter whether you're a red-light vehicle or blue lighter. Hide-aways are not permitted for personal vehicles, period. The reason was that a personal vehicle is different than an emergency vehicle that is spec'd, purchased, and then used for its life as an emergency vehicle.

Another way to put it is that Fred wins the popularity contest to become Fire Chief. He cuts hide-aways into the headlights/taillights/parking light fixtures, then three months later he gets pissed off and quits. His vehicle's still equipped. Even if he takes the bulbs out, he's lost the SAE certification for the lamp modules (which requires an intact module to be tested).

I want to put a blue dash light in my vehicle, and was told I can't.

Correct, you cannot. You are permitted one or two blue lights, or a lightbar with blue lights only. They must be mounted on the roof/cab of the vehicle. Red lights are different – they have more flexibility for mounting, but unless it's a police car it cannot have lights inside the vehicle.

I want to put amber in my blue lightbar to increase its visibility.

Sorry, you're allowed blue, only. While all of the studies state amber is a better color than blue overall to slow people down, we were assigned blue only. If you'd rather switch to amber only, the legislature will probably not mind, but we need them to change the law first.

I want to put alley lights and floodlights on my vehicle to light me up at night when I'm directing traffic.

The MUTCD requires flaggers to be illuminated during nighttime work, except for emergencies. It is safer if you're illuminated. If you are an emergency vehicle (red lights), you are permitted to have alley lights and floods. If you are a blue light vehicle, you are not permitted. The purpose of blue lights was only identification, not utility.