

Public Safety Terminology: Emergency Vehicles

By: David Dickerson, Legislative Analyst II
August 21, 2026 | 2026-R-0131

Issue

As part of a series of questions on public safety terminology, you asked for each instance (1) “emergency vehicle” and similar terms are defined in statute, and (2) they are used.

Summary

There are eight definitions of “emergency vehicle” (and similar terms, such as “authorized emergency vehicle”) currently in statute. Generally, these definitions include vehicles that are used in emergencies by certain entities (for example, police and firefighters), but the included entities vary between statutes. We describe each definition below.

There are 39 statutes that reference or define “emergency vehicle” (or a similar term) in statute. Most of these refer to the definitions in either [CGS §§ 14-1](#) or [14-283](#), or both, but seven are not defined or the definition is unclear. Appendix 1 below provides brief descriptions of each of these statutes and is organized by statutory definition.

Definitions of Emergency Vehicle

CGS § 4a-67d

[CGS § 4a-67d](#), as amended by [PA 26-63](#), § 1, defines “emergency vehicle,” for the purpose of an exception to certain clean-energy-related state purchasing requirements for vehicles, to be a vehicle used by any of the following entities for law enforcement or emergency response purposes:

1. the departments of Motor Vehicles (DMV), Emergency Services and Public Protection, Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), Correction (DOC), Mental Health and Addiction Services, Developmental Services, Social Services, Children and Families, Transportation;
2. the Capitol Police;
3. the Judicial Department;
4. the Board of Pardons and Paroles;
5. the Board of Regents for Higher Education; or
6. UCONN or UCONN Health Center.

CGS § 14-1

[CGS § 14-1](#), as amended by [PA 25-55](#), § 25 & [PA 25-159](#), §§ 38-40, defines “authorized emergency vehicle,” generally for the motor vehicle chapter, to be (1) a fire department vehicle, (2) a police vehicle, or (3) an authorized emergency medical services (EMS) vehicle (see [CGS § 19a-175](#) below).

CGS § 14-283

For certain rights and privileges conveyed to operators of emergency vehicles (for example, passing a stop sign), [CGS § 14-283](#) defines “emergency vehicle” to be:

1. any ambulance or vehicle operated by an EMS organization member responding to an emergency call or taking a patient to a hospital;
2. any vehicle used by a fire department or by any fire department officer on the way to a fire or emergency, but not while returning;
3. any state or local police vehicle operated by a police officer or DMV inspector answering an emergency call, or in pursuit;
4. any DOC vehicle operated by a correction officer as part of his or her job and while responding to an emergency call; or
5. any DEEP vehicle operated by a DEEP employee authorized to operate the vehicle as part of his or her job and while on the way to a fire or responding to an emergency call, but not while returning.

CGS § 14-283b

[CGS § 14-283b](#), as amended by [PA 25-159](#), § 64, and for the purpose of a statute requiring drivers to move over or reduce speed when encountering an emergency vehicle under certain conditions, defines “emergency vehicle” to be any vehicle with activated flashing lights that is:

1. operated by a member of an EMS organization responding to an emergency call;
2. operated by a fire department or by any fire department officer responding to a fire or other emergency;
3. operated by a police officer;
4. a maintenance vehicle (any vehicle in use by the state certain municipal entities, or public service companies when maintaining public highways or bridges and facilities located within the limits of public highways or bridges); or
5. a wrecker (generally a vehicle used for towing or transporting wrecked or disabled motor vehicles for compensation or a related purpose).

CGS § 19a-175

[CGS § 19a-175](#) defines “authorized EMS vehicle,” for the purpose of certain EMS statutes, to be an ambulance, invalid coach or advanced emergency technician-staffed intercept vehicle, or a paramedic-staffed intercept vehicle licensed or certified by the Department of Public Health (DPH) for purposes of providing emergency medical care to patients.

It similarly defines “nontransport emergency vehicle” to be a vehicle used by emergency medical technicians or paramedics in responding to emergency calls that is not used to carry patients.

CGS § 42-355

[CGS § 42-355](#) defines, for the purpose of a specific warranty-related statute, “emergency vehicle” to be any new motor vehicle that is purchased or leased by a state agency, municipality or municipal fire department, or volunteer ambulance company, on or after July 1, 1999, and used as (1) firefighting apparatus, (2) an ambulance, or (3) a rescue vehicle.

Appendix 1: Usage of “Emergency Vehicle” and Similar Terms in Statute

Statute §	Brief Description	Definition §
14-80	Authorizes authorized emergency vehicles to be equipped with a siren, whistle, or bell, that is capable of emitting sound audible under normal conditions from a distance of at least 500 feet and of a type the DMV approved	14-1
14-98	Exempts authorized emergency vehicles from certain tire and wheel requirements	14-1
14-100a	Exempts certain authorized emergency vehicles from seat-belt requirements if they are responding to an emergency call	14-1
14-145 , as amended by PA 25-55 , § 1	Authorizes owners or lessees of private commercial property, or their agent, to tow any motor vehicle left without authorization in an area reserved for authorized emergency vehicles; exempts emergency vehicles from towing generally	14-1
14-145e , as amended by PA 25-159 , § 62	Exempts areas reserved for authorized emergency vehicles from having conspicuous towing signage	14-1
14-212 , as amended by PA 25-159 , § 42	Defines “authorized emergency vehicle” for certain statutes related to highway use	14-1
14-248b	Requires individuals guiding cattle or other livestock across a highway to yield to authorized emergency vehicles; specifies that it does not relieve the emergency vehicle from their duties to drive with safety and due care	14-1
14-279b	Provides defenses for failing to stop for a school bus that is detected and recorded by certain monitoring systems, including that it was necessary for an emergency vehicle to pass	14-1
14-283a	Defines “pursuit” to be an attempt by a police officer in an authorized emergency vehicle to apprehend certain motor vehicles under certain circumstances	14-1
14-296aa , as amended by PA 26-120 , § 1	Allows, among others, authorized emergency vehicle operators to use phones while driving on a highway under certain circumstances	14-1
14-296bb	Allows authorized emergency vehicles responding to an emergency call to travel on dedicated roadways for bus rapid transit services	14-1
14-297 , as amended by PA 25-159 , § 55	Defines “authorized emergency vehicle” for certain traffic control statutes	14-1
14-300c	Requires pedestrians to yield the right of way to authorized emergency vehicles that approach the pedestrian while emitting an audible or visual emergency signal; specifies that the provision does not exempt those vehicles driving with safety and due care	14-1

Appendix 1 (continued)

Statute §	Brief Description	Definition §
PA 26-63 , §§ 5 & 6 (not yet codified)	Permits the state traffic administrator to designate any lane or shoulder of a highway as a dynamic part-time lane to be used as a dedicated lane for authorized emergency vehicles responding to an emergency call; when used for that purpose, no person may drive in that lane unless the person is operating an authorized emergency vehicle responding to an emergency call, or is obeying the direction of a law enforcement officer	14-1
4b-13a , as amended by PA 26-63 , § 2	Exempts certain emergency vehicles from certain electric vehicle parking restrictions	14-283
14-96q , as amended by PA 26-147	Authorizes the DMV commissioner to allow certain emergency vehicles to use certain colored and flashing lights	14-283
14-111r , as amended by PA 25-159 , § 26	Requires a highway work zone and roadside vehicle safety awareness program to, among other things, review proper interactions with emergency vehicles	14-283
14-230a , as amended by PA 25-65 , § 16	Exempts certain emergency vehicles from a ban on driving in the leftmost lane in certain divided limited access highways	14-283
14-279c , as amended by PA 25-159 , § 24	Provides defenses for failing to stop for a school bus, including that it was necessary for an emergency vehicle to pass, or the operator was driving an emergency vehicle under certain circumstances	14-283
14-307j	Establishes a defense for emergency vehicle operators using certain audible warning signal devices from municipal noise-related ordinances	14-283
52-557n	Specifies that a statute eliminating certain governmental immunities does not limit or expand the duties and exemptions given to operators of emergency vehicles	14-283
14-279	Requires authorized emergency vehicles to stop for school buses, except in certain circumstances	14-1 & 14-283
14-307c , as amended by PA 25-65 , § 30	Provides certain legal defenses to operators of emergency vehicles for certain municipal ordinance traffic violations	14-1 & 14-283
19a-177 , as amended by PA 26-12 , § 68	Requires the DPH commissioner to (1) license and certify, among other things, emergency transportation vehicles to ensure state standards are maintained and (2) annually issue a list of equipment requirements for EMS vehicles based on national standards	19a-175
19a-181	Among other things, requires (1) DPH to inspect authorized EMS vehicles for compliance with minimum standards and (2) those vehicles to use certain equipment, and comply with state and federal safety, design, and equipment standards	19a-175

Appendix 1 (continued)

Statute §	Brief Description	Definition §
<u>8-1bb</u>	Authorizes municipalities to require certain temporary health care structures to be accessible to emergency vehicles	N/A
<u>14-96z</u>	Exempts “emergency vehicle warning lamps” from a statute restricting the intensity of certain lights during certain times	N/A
<u>14-105</u>	Exempts video display units, or other devices, that are installed in emergency vehicles from a ban on certain distracting devices installed in motor vehicles	N/A
<u>14-251</u> , as amended by <u>PA 25-65</u> , § 4	Exempts emergency vehicles from certain parking rules (for example, parking within 10 feet of a fire hydrant)	N/A
<u>19a-180</u>	Among other things, specifies a procedure an EMS organization can add emergency vehicles to their fleet	N/A
<u>23-15a</u>	Requires DEEP to reimburse costs incurred to municipalities when the use of a state limits the movement of emergency vehicles, among other reasons	N/A
<u>23-16c</u>	Requires DEEP to develop and post the capacity limit for Squantz Pond State Park and establishes factors for that capacity, including, among other things, the impact on the travel of emergency vehicles	N/A

DD:ms