

Flashing lights and sirens

Purpose

To inform vehicle owners and operators of the types of flashing lights and/or sirens that may be fitted to certain types of vehicles and when they can be used.

Introduction

The Road Transport (Vehicle Registration) Regulation 2017 (the Regulation) allows certain nominated vehicles be fitted with a light or lights capable of displaying a flashing or rotating light of an associated colour, and sirens. This document explains the types of motor vehicles that may be fitted with flashing lights and/or sirens, the meaning of the various flashing light colours, the types of siren sounds and the circumstances in which these warning devices may be used.

Note: The term 'flashing light(s)' used herein is equally applicable to rotating light(s).

Flashing lights

A flashing light displayed on a vehicle can only be blue, red, green, magenta/crimson or amber/yellow. Each of these colours, or combination of colours, is intended to convey a specific warning to road users. To guard against incorrect use and to avoid possible distraction from the significance of a flashing light, their use is limited to particular types of vehicles and in particular circumstances.

Colours of flashing lights and their meaning

In addition to the information below, the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) may approve any type of vehicle to be fitted with a light that emits a specified colour.

BLUE, OR BLUE AND RED

Blue, or blue and red flashing lights must only be fitted to:

- Police vehicles.
- Ambulances solely used by the Ambulance Service of NSW as defined under the *Health Services Act 1997* or a vehicle authorised by the Ambulance Service of NSW under its delegated authority.
- Operational fire brigade vehicles and accredited NSW Rural Fire Service vehicles.

For further enquiries

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- A vehicle used by a Traffic Commander or a Traffic Emergency Patroller appointed or employed by the RTA.
- State Emergency Service vehicles.
- Vehicles used by an accredited rescue unit as defined in the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989*.

The use of blue, or blue and red flashing lights is intended to advise other road users that the vehicle displaying them is responding to an emergency situation. They must only be used when the vehicle is being used for police operational functions or urgent purposes arising from an accident, fire or other emergency.

Red

In addition to the vehicles listed above, red flashing lights must only be fitted to:

- Red Cross vehicles used for the conveyance of blood for urgent transfusions.
- Mines rescue vehicles.
- Other rescue vehicles.
- Other emergency vehicles not referenced above that are driven by an emergency worker in the course of their duties, where an 'emergency worker' is a person (or one of a class of persons) approved by the RTA.

A red flashing light warns road users of the presence of a vehicle associated with a risk-to-life situation. It must only be used when the vehicle is being used for urgent purposes arising from an accident, fire or other emergency.

Green

A green flashing light warns road users of the presence of a stationary operational fire brigade, accredited NSW Rural Fire Service, ambulance or police emergency site command vehicle. They should not be operated while a vehicle is in motion. These display a red, or red and blue flashing light as applicable while in motion (see above).

Magenta/crimson

A magenta/crimson flashing light warns road users of the presence of an RTA enforcement vehicle or a vehicle used by a local council officer engaged in monitoring or measuring the weight of heavy vehicles.

Amber/yellow

An amber or yellow flashing light warns road users of an obstruction to the free flow of traffic. Amber/yellow flashing lights may be fitted to vehicles which operate in hazardous situations, and must only be used when the vehicle is standing in a hazardous position or is moving in hazardous circumstances. The light does not have to be removed when the vehicle operates in non-hazardous situations but it must not flash.

Examples of vehicles which can be fitted with amber/yellow flashing lights are:

- Tow trucks.
- Motor breakdown service vehicles.
- Public utility service vehicles (eg street sweepers, garbage trucks and elevating platforms).
- Special purpose vehicles, such as mobile cranes which exceed dimension limits.
- Vehicles frequently used to transport loads that exceed maximum length, width or height limits (under permit or notice).
- Escort vehicles for large, overdimension vehicles.
- Milk delivery vehicles required to stop frequently.
- Buses used for the conveyance of children to or from school.
- Private security vehicles.
- Volunteer vehicles not accredited by the State Rescue Board.
- Council Ranger by-law officers.

In addition, street vending vehicles, such as ice cream vans or other food vending vehicles, must display a flashing amber light while stopped for the purpose of serving customers. Audible and visual indicators must be fitted to inform the driver that the light is flashing. The light must begin to flash within one second of being switched on and continue to flash at a rate not less than 60 times per minute.

There is no need to obtain approval from the RTA to fit amber/yellow flashing lights to vehicles.

The use of amber/yellow flashing lights, does not give any priority over other traffic nor does it permit the contravention of the Regulation or the [NSW] Road Rules 2008 (the NSWRR).

Location of lights

Flashing warning lights must be mounted on top of the vehicle, except for Police and RTA enforcement vehicles, which are excluded from this requirement. They must be visible in normal daylight from a distance of at least 200 metres to drivers of vehicles approaching from any direction. Additional lights may be used on the vehicle to meet this requirement.

To avoid distraction to the driver, the lens of any such flashing light must not be visible, either directly or indirectly, including in the rear view mirrors, to the driver of the motor vehicle or trailer to which it is fitted when that driver is seated in the normal driving position.

Hazard warning lights

To avoid confusion to other motorists, hazard warning lights, comprising a system that causes all direction indicators to flash simultaneously, may only be switched on if the vehicle is standing or moving in hazardous circumstances, and they must operate automatically for school buses when setting down or taking up children being conveyed to or from school. The use of hazard lights does not permit drivers to stand or park illegally.

Headlights

Emergency vehicles

Flashing headlights may be fitted to the following emergency vehicles:

- Police vehicles.
- Ambulances as defined above.
- Operational fire brigade vehicles and accredited NSW Rural Fire Service vehicles.
- Vehicles used by Traffic Commanders or Traffic Emergency Patrollers appointed or employed by the RTA.
- Red Cross vehicles used for conveyance of blood for urgent transfusions.
- Mines rescue or other rescue vehicles.
- State Emergency Service vehicles.
- Vehicles used by an accredited rescue unit as defined in the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989*.
- Other emergency vehicles that are driven by an emergency worker in the course of their duties, where an 'emergency worker' is a person (or one of a class of persons) approved by the RTA.

When fitted, the headlights must be wired to operate in conjunction with any flashing lights fitted to the vehicle and only when on low beam. They must only be operated when responding to an emergency and the vehicle is being driven by an authorised person wearing a badge or other distinguishing mark indicating that authority.

School buses

In addition, flashing low beam headlights must be fitted to school buses. For more information, refer to RTA Technical Specification No. 142 *Warning signs and lights for school buses*.

Sirens

Vehicles to which sirens may be fitted

Sirens may only be fitted to the following emergency service vehicles:

- Police vehicles.
- Ambulances as defined above.
- Operational fire brigade and accredited NSW Rural Fire Service vehicles.
- Red Cross vehicles used for urgent blood deliveries.
- Mines rescue vehicles approved by the Mines Rescue Board.
- Rescue vehicles accredited by the State Rescue Board and approved by the RTA.
- Accredited 'volunteer' rescue vehicles approved by the State Rescue Board, endorsed by the NSW Police Service and approved by the RTA.
- Australian Federal Police vehicles.
- Australian Customs Service vehicles.
- Airservices Australia vehicles.
- A vehicle used by a Traffic Commander or a Traffic Emergency Patroller appointed or employed by the RTA, or a vehicle used by the RTA Vehicle Regulation Enforcement section.
- A person (or person belonging to a class of persons) approved by the Authority.
- A vehicle at least 25 years old that is fitted as a police or emergency vehicle if:
 - the vehicle is used for exhibition purposes.
 - it is part of a collection of former police or emergency vehicles.

Siren sound

Sirens may emit one or more of the following sounds:

- A continuous, wailing sound.
- An alternating 'hee-haw' sound.
- An urgent, repeated 'whooping' sound.

The fitting of sirens, alternating dual-tone horns or any device which produces a sound resembling these emergency warning sounds is prohibited on vehicles other than the emergency service vehicles specified above.

Signage

Only vehicles operated by organisations authorised under the relevant legislation can be affixed with signage of any kind to indicate that they are emergency service vehicles, eg 'Police', 'Ambulance', etc. A person must not modify a vehicle in this way without the proper authorisation provided by the relevant emergency services agency.

Exemptions from the [NSW] Road Rules 2014

A person driving a vehicle for police operational functions or urgent purposes arising from an accident, fire or other emergency, may be exempt from complying with the provisions of the NSWRR providing they take reasonable care, it is reasonable that the rule does not apply, and when the vehicle is moving it is displaying a blue and/or red flashing light or sounding an alarm.

Note: Vehicles excluded from having warning lights mounted on their roofs should have them temporarily affixed in a prominent position, eg by magnet to the roof, when operating under such circumstances.

Responsibilities of other road users

Under the provisions of the NSWRR, drivers of other vehicles must give way to, and not move into the path of, any approaching police or emergency services vehicle that is sounding a siren or other alarm, or displaying a flashing blue or red light whether or not it is also displaying other lights.