One emergency at a time, please

Everyone knows what emergency workers do. From police officers to firefighters and paramedics, their job is to help or protect us in the event of a crisis. Simply put, we depend on them to keep us safe.

But what some people don’t know is that emergency personnel need our help to keep them safe as well. On average in Saskatchewan, each year there are 60 vehicle crashes involving an emergency vehicle, resulting in approximately 17 injuries.

As a motorist, the first way to protect emergency workers is to stay alert behind the wheel. Scan your mirrors periodically to check for flashing lights and have your stereo volume low enough to hear sirens.

If an emergency vehicle approaches you with lights flashing or sirens engaged – be it a police car, fire truck or ambulance – you must safely pull over to the right side of the road as quickly as possible. On one-way streets, motorists should pull over to the nearest curb.

Emergency vehicles have the right-of-way and take precedence over all other traffic. Wait at the side of the street until they have safely passed and watch closely for additional emergency vehicles approaching from behind.

It’s also important not to enter an intersection until the emergency vehicle is completely through it, even if you have a green light. The only exception to this rule is when a peace officer gives you other directions.

These rules also apply when meeting or being overtaken by an emergency vehicle on the highway. If an emergency vehicle is stopped on the side of the road with its lights flashing, you must slow to 60 km/h unless you’re driving on the opposite side of a divided highway. The same rule applies for tow trucks at the side of the highway with amber lights flashing.

Failing to slow puts emergency workers and other motorists at risk of serious injury or even death. What’s more, you’ll face a fine of $140, plus $2 for every kilometre over the 60 km/h speed limit. If a driver is over 90 km/h, the fine increases to $4 for every kilometre over the 60 km/h speed limit.

Simply put, if you maintain a highway speed of 100 km/h as you pass an emergency worker, you’ll face a $300 ticket.

We all need to do our part when it comes to safety. Watch for emergency vehicles, yield the right of way and slow down when passing personnel on the highway. It’s that simple, and it can mean the difference between helping in one emergency and causing another.

Do you have a driving tip you would like addressed in this column?

E-mail your question or concern to communications@sgi.sk.ca.