

Ambulance Accidents in Georgia and Who Can Be Held Liable

An Emergency Run Can Change the Traffic Rules, but It Doesn't Erase Responsibility

An ambulance comes through an intersection with its lights flashing and siren sounding. A driver enters on a green light. The vehicles collide. Or a patient is being transported to the hospital when the ambulance loses control, rear-ends traffic, or is struck by another motorist who didn't yield. These crashes can look like ordinary [car accidents](#), but the legal questions are different almost immediately.

Georgia gives authorized emergency vehicles certain traffic privileges when they're responding to an emergency. Those privileges can include proceeding through a red light after slowing as necessary for safe operation and exceeding the posted speed limit under limited circumstances. They aren't a blanket exemption from responsibility, and they don't automatically decide who caused a crash.

The ownership of the ambulance matters too. A private ambulance company, hospital-based service, city EMS unit, county service, or state government entity can bring a different liability and insurance framework into the case. At [Gary Martin Hays & Associates](#), our Georgia car accident lawyers know that means the investigation has to answer two questions at the same time: how the collision happened and exactly who owned, operated, employed, maintained, and controlled the ambulance involved.

Georgia Treats an Ambulance as an Authorized Emergency Vehicle

Georgia's motor vehicle code expressly includes an ambulance within the definition of an [authorized emergency vehicle](#). That designation matters, but the special driving privileges are tied to the circumstances in which the vehicle is being used.

Under [O.C.G.A. § 40-6-6](#), the driver of an authorized emergency vehicle responding to an emergency call may exercise several privileges that an ordinary driver doesn't have. Subject to the statute's conditions, the ambulance driver may:

- **Proceed Through a Red Light or Stop Sign:** The driver may proceed, but only after slowing as may be necessary for safe operation.
- **Exceed the Speed Limit:** The statute permits excess speed only so long as the driver doesn't endanger life or property.
- **Disregard Certain Direction or Turning Rules:** An emergency vehicle may disregard regulations governing direction of movement or specified turns while the statutory conditions are met.

- **Stop or Stand Where Other Vehicles Could Not:** The statute also permits emergency parking or standing that would otherwise violate ordinary traffic rules.

For an ambulance to claim those statutory traffic privileges, the statute requires the use of an audible signal and a flashing or revolving red light visible as required by law. Even then, the statute expressly says the driver isn't relieved of the duty to drive with due regard for the safety of all persons.

Emergency Privileges Aren't the Same Thing as Immunity

This is one of the most important distinctions in an ambulance crash case. The fact that an ambulance was responding to an emergency doesn't automatically excuse the driver from a collision. It changes which traffic rules may apply and what conduct must be evaluated.

Georgia appellate courts have treated the privileges in § 40-6-6 as an affirmative defense rather than an automatic presumption in favor of the emergency vehicle. In [Chandler v. City of LaFayette](#), the Court of Appeals emphasized that an emergency driver still owes the statutory duty of due regard and that whether the required care was exercised can be a jury question.

An older Georgia ambulance case makes another point that still matters. In [City of Macon v. Smith](#), the Court of Appeals explained that whether the ambulance was actually “responding to an emergency call” could itself be disputed. The defendant carried the burden of establishing the conditions needed to claim the emergency-vehicle exemptions.

That means an ambulance's lights, siren, dispatch status, route, speed, and reason for the trip aren't side issues. They can determine which rules governed the driver at the moment of impact.

A 2026 Georgia Law Reinforces Duties on Both Sides of the Road

Georgia updated O.C.G.A. § 40-6-74 effective July 1, 2026. The current rule requires motorists who are approached by an authorized emergency vehicle using the required audible and visual signals to yield the right of way, move as close as possible to the right-hand edge or curb clear of an intersection, and stop until the emergency vehicle has passed.

The same [2026 legislation](#) also preserves a critical sentence: the rule doesn't relieve the emergency-vehicle operator from the duty to drive with due regard for everyone's safety. An ambulance collision can therefore involve fault on more than one side. A motorist may have failed to yield, while the ambulance driver may also have entered an intersection or traveled at a speed that wasn't safe under the circumstances.

That shared-fault possibility is especially important in [side-impact and intersection crashes](#), where signal timing, sight distance, vehicle speed, and the sequence of who entered first can matter more than the simple fact that one vehicle had flashing lights.

Who Can Be Held Liable After an Ambulance Accident in Georgia?

The liable party depends on how the ambulance service is structured and what actually caused the collision. A serious case may involve one defendant or several.

- 1. The Ambulance Driver:** A privately employed ambulance driver may be personally responsible when negligent driving causes the crash. Relevant conduct can include entering an intersection without slowing enough for safe operation, driving too fast for traffic or weather, unsafe lane changes, distraction, or claiming emergency privileges when the statutory conditions weren't met.
- 2. A Private Ambulance Company or Hospital System:** If the driver was acting within the scope of employment, the employer may be responsible for the employee's negligence. A private entity may also face its own claims involving negligent training, supervision, vehicle maintenance, or safety practices when the evidence supports those theories.
- 3. A City, County, or Other Public Entity:** Many Georgia EMS systems are operated by local governments or public agencies. A government-owned ambulance changes the claim because sovereign immunity, statutory waivers, proper defendants, insurance coverage, and pre-suit notice requirements can all affect whether and how the case proceeds.
- 4. Another Motorist:** Drivers must respond appropriately to an approaching ambulance using its required signals. A driver who fails to yield, turns across the ambulance's path, follows too closely, or enters an intersection without accounting for the emergency vehicle may be responsible for some or all of the crash.
- 5. A Maintenance Contractor or Vehicle Manufacturer:** A brake failure, tire problem, steering defect, or other mechanical issue can move the investigation beyond driving behavior. Maintenance records and preservation of the ambulance itself become important when equipment failure may have contributed.

Ownership alone doesn't answer every liability question. A county may contract with a private EMS provider. A hospital may own vehicles but use a separate operating entity. A driver may be employed by one company while the ambulance is leased from another. The contracts, payroll records, insurance policies, and operational control can matter as much as the name painted on the side of the vehicle.

Government-Owned Ambulances Have a Different Liability Framework

When a city or county owns or operates the ambulance, the case can't be handled exactly like a claim against a private company. Georgia sovereign-immunity rules determine when the government can be sued and how much immunity has been waived.

Under [O.C.G.A. § 36-92-2](#), local governments have an automatic waiver of sovereign immunity for claims arising from the negligent use of a covered motor vehicle up to specified statutory amounts. For incidents after January 1, 2008, the statute provides a \$500,000 waiver for bodily injury or death to one person, a \$700,000 aggregate for two or more people, and \$50,000 for property damage.

Those numbers shouldn't automatically be treated as the absolute ceiling. The statute allows the waiver to increase when the local government adopts a higher waiver, participates in qualifying risk coverage, or purchases commercial liability insurance above the statutory amount. In the 2026 decision [Vu v. City of Atlanta](#), the Georgia Court of Appeals specifically rejected the idea that § 36-92-2 always creates an unchangeable \$500,000 cap.

The proper defendant can also change. Under [O.C.G.A. § 36-92-3](#), a local government employee generally isn't individually sued for a covered motor-vehicle tort committed while performing official duties; the local government entity is named instead. That is very different from a routine private-company vehicle case.

The Notice Deadline May Arrive Long Before the Two-Year Injury Deadline

Government ambulance cases are unusually time-sensitive because Georgia's pre-suit notice rules can expire before the ordinary personal-injury statute of limitations.

- **City-Owned Ambulance:** O.C.G.A. § 36-33-5 generally requires written ante litem notice to a municipality within six months of the event, with specific information about the injury and claimed negligence.
- **County-Owned Ambulance:** O.C.G.A. § 36-11-1 generally requires claims against counties to be presented within 12 months after they accrue.
- **State Government Ambulance or State Entity:** The Georgia Tort Claims Act generally requires written notice within 12 months of when the loss was discovered or should have been discovered, and the notice has detailed service requirements.

This is the same reason [claims involving government responsibility after a one-vehicle crash](#) can't safely wait until the usual two-year deadline is approaching. A strong negligence claim can still be lost if the correct entity isn't identified and the required notice isn't delivered on time.

What Evidence Can Show Whether the Ambulance Was Operating Safely?

Ambulance crashes can generate unusually detailed records because the vehicle is part of an organized emergency-response system. The key is identifying those records quickly and preserving them before routine retention practices, repairs, or personnel changes make the investigation harder.

- **Dispatch and Call Records:** Computer-aided dispatch data, call logs, radio traffic, and the original request for service can help show whether the ambulance was responding to an emergency, what priority was assigned, and what the crew had been told.
- **GPS and Fleet Telematics:** Location and fleet data may show the ambulance's route, movement, speed history, and timing. What is available depends on the vehicle and the service's systems.
- **Dashcam, Traffic, and Business Video:** Video may show whether lights and sirens were active, how the ambulance approached an intersection, whether other drivers yielded, and when braking began.
- **Vehicle Data:** If the ambulance or another involved vehicle contains recoverable event data, an independent review can help establish speed, braking, and other pre-impact inputs.

As with other serious crashes, [event data recorder evidence has to be interpreted in context](#) rather than treated as a complete reconstruction by itself.

- **Maintenance and Inspection Records:** Brake, tire, steering, lighting, and other maintenance records may matter when a mechanical issue is suspected. Georgia EMS rules require ground ambulance services to maintain vehicle maintenance records.
- **Driver Training and Licensing Records:** The ambulance driver's license status, EMS credentials when applicable, employer training, prior performance issues, and agency policies can become relevant when the claim involves qualification or supervision.

Georgia's [EMS regulations](#) require ground ambulances to be properly equipped, maintained, and operated, require registered vehicles to be inspected, and require ambulance services to maintain maintenance records. The rules also require people operating EMS agency vehicles to hold a valid and unrestricted driver's license and direct licensees to act with due regard for patient and public safety when operating an emergency vehicle.

When the physical scene and electronic records don't tell the whole story, [accident reconstruction can connect speed, braking, impact geometry, video, and roadway evidence](#) into a more complete timeline.

What If You Were the Patient Inside the Ambulance?

A patient being transported is not responsible for how the ambulance is driven. If the ambulance crashes, the patient's claim may involve the ambulance driver and operating entity, another negligent motorist, or both.

The medical part of the case can be unusually complicated because the patient was already sick or injured before the collision. The ambulance company may argue that symptoms after the wreck were caused by the condition that required transport in the first place. The injured person may need medical evidence separating the pre-existing emergency from new trauma or aggravation caused by the crash.

The same basic principle applies to anyone injured while riding as an occupant: [a passenger can pursue compensation from the parties whose negligence caused the collision](#). The fact that the passenger happened to be inside an ambulance doesn't eliminate those rights.

What If Another Driver Caused the Ambulance Crash?

Not every ambulance collision is caused by the ambulance crew. A [failure to yield](#) can become the central fault issue when a driver hears a siren but accelerates through an intersection, fails to move right, follows an ambulance through a cleared intersection, or makes an unsafe turn into its path.

The ambulance's emergency status doesn't automatically make the other driver 100 percent responsible either. Investigators still need to determine whether the ambulance was using the required signals, whether its speed was safe, whether the driver slowed before a red light or stop sign, and whether both drivers had enough time and distance to react.

Georgia's [modified comparative-fault rule](#) can reduce compensation when an injured person shares responsibility and bars recovery when the plaintiff is 50 percent or more responsible for the injury or damages claimed. In a multi-party ambulance crash, fault may be apportioned among the ambulance operator, another driver, an employer, or other responsible entities depending on the evidence.

What Compensation May Be Available After an Ambulance Accident?

Ambulance crashes can cause the same catastrophic injuries as any other high-energy collision: traumatic brain injuries, spinal injuries, fractures, internal trauma, and permanent disability. A patient who was already medically vulnerable may suffer an additional injury that makes recovery much harder.

Depending on the case, [Georgia car accident compensation](#) may include:

- **Medical Expenses:** Emergency treatment, hospitalization, surgery, rehabilitation, medication, medical equipment, and medically supported future care.
- **Lost Income:** Pay lost while the injured person couldn't work because of the crash.

For a longer recovery, [documenting lost wages](#) can require employer records, tax information, disability notes, and evidence of how the injury affected the person's ability to return to work.

- **Pain and Loss of Function:** Physical pain, emotional distress, limitations, and loss of normal activities may be part of the non-economic damages analysis.
- **Future Financial Losses:** Permanent restrictions can affect future earning capacity, medical care, and the support a seriously injured person will need.
- **Wrongful Death Damages:** When an ambulance collision is fatal, surviving family members and the estate may have separate claims under Georgia wrongful-death law.

If a commercial or privately operated ambulance is involved in a fatal wreck, many of the same questions about employer responsibility, insurance, and corporate records that arise in [wrongful death claims involving commercial vehicles](#) may become important.

Georgia's current rules for [medical-expense evidence after SB 68](#) can also affect how past medical charges are presented in newer injury cases. The ambulance crash itself may generate a second layer of emergency bills on top of the treatment that was already underway before the collision.

Our Georgia Car Accident Lawyers Can Identify Who Was Responsible

An ambulance crash shouldn't be reduced to "the ambulance had the right of way" or "the other driver should have moved over." Those statements may be part of the analysis, but they aren't the entire case.

Our Georgia car accident lawyers can determine whether the ambulance was on an emergency response, obtain dispatch and fleet records, preserve available video and vehicle data, review EMS maintenance and licensing information, identify the correct operating entity, and determine whether government notice requirements apply. We can also investigate every other driver or company whose conduct contributed to the collision.

If you or someone you love was injured in an ambulance accident in Georgia, [contact us](#) for a free consultation. We can review how the crash happened, who owned and operated the ambulance, and what deadlines and insurance issues may affect the claim.