



Department of Motor Vehicles  
Agency of Transportation

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March 1, 2024

VIA EMAIL ONLY  
[mbaker@softlights.org](mailto:mbaker@softlights.org)

Mark Baker, President  
Soft Lights Foundation  
9450 SW Gemini Drive  
PMB 44671  
Beaverton, OR 97008

Re: Petition for Rulemaking to Regulate Sirens and Flashing Lights

Dear Mr. Baker:

This letter is in response to your Petition for Rulemaking to Regulate Sirens and Flashing Lights submitted to Commissioner Wanda Minoli of the Department of Motor Vehicles on February 2, 2024. Specifically, you request that the Department begin the rulemaking process to regulate sirens and flashing lights on emergency vehicles.

Pursuant to 3 V.S.A. §806, the Department of Motor Vehicles (hereinafter DMV) has thirty days from the date of the petition to begin the rulemaking proceedings, adopt a procedure, or deny the request and provide a written explanation as to why the petition was denied.

For the reasons set forth below, the petition is denied.

### **BACKGROUND**

On February 2, 2024, at 11:59 p.m. you sent an email to Commissioner Minoli which contained a Petition requesting that DMV adopt a proposed rule entitled Emergency Vehicles. The proposed rule sets forth the following proposed language you designated as Code of Vermont Rules No. 14-050-055. Petition at 21.

Rule No. 14-050-055 – Emergency Vehicles.

#### **8.1 Emergency Sirens**

1. The use of emergency vehicle sirens shall be limited to a maximum of 80 decibels.
2. Siren use shall be limited to a specific need during travel; continuous operation during travel or while stationary is prohibited.

#### **8.2 Emergency Lights**

1. Lights that trigger seizures, migraines, panic attacks or other adverse neurological impacts, which impair vision or cognitive functioning, or which create a discriminatory barrier, are prohibited.

Currently, there are no specific requirements in Vermont statutes, Title 23 regarding the maximum volume of a siren on emergency vehicles or restrictions on types of lights that the petition claims “trigger adverse neurological impacts, impair vision or cognitive functioning, or which create a discriminatory barrier.”

There are, however, requirements for when lights and/or sirens are used by an emergency vehicle.

## DISCUSSION

Authorized Emergency Vehicles are defined as “a vehicle of a fire department, police vehicle, public and private ambulance, and a vehicle to which a permit has been issued pursuant to subdivision 1252(a)(1) or (2) of this title.” 23 V.S.A. §4(1).

Soft Lights Foundation’s petition applies to fire department vehicles, police vehicles, and ambulances, public and private.

The use of lights and sirens on fire department vehicles, police vehicles, and ambulances (authorized emergency vehicles) occur in certain circumstances pursuant to 23 V.S.A. §1015(a) when:

[t]he driver of an authorized emergency vehicle, when responding to an emergency call or when responding to, but not returning from, a fire alarm and a law enforcement officer operating an authorized emergency vehicle in fresh pursuit of a suspected violator of the law [... and] (b) The exemptions granted to an authorized emergency vehicle apply only when the vehicle is making use of audible or visual signals meeting the requirements of this title.

Petitioner asserts that the proposed new rule is necessary to ensure the comfort, health, safety, and civil rights of first responders, patients, and the public by prohibiting or restricting the use of high intensity flashing lights and excessively loud sirens on emergency vehicles. Petition at 3.

Petitioner alleges that emergency sirens impact large numbers of people who are uninvolved with emergencies and that certain individuals and animals suffer anxiety, fear, panic attacks, pain, and stress due to the use of the sirens. Petition at 3.

Petitioner also alleges that the flashing and intensity of emergency LED lights impact the patient, public, and first responders and put them at risk of injury or death because they impair vision and cognitive functioning, as well as cause photosensitive seizures, migraines, panic attacks, and eye damage for some people. Petition at 2, 3.

Vermont law is clear that an authorized emergency vehicle must use visual or audible signals (sirens or emergency lights) in emergency situations when parking contrary to the provisions of 23 V.S.A. Chapter 13, proceeding through stop sign or a red signal, exceeding maximum speed limit, driving or turning contrary to the direction of movement. 23 V.S.A. §2015(a).

The Department of Motor Vehicles does regulate the color of lights on vehicles which respond to emergency situations in 23 V.S.A. §1252; however, it does not otherwise regulate types of lights, or the flashing of lights, nor the decibel level of sirens on emergency vehicles.

The use of flashing lights and sirens on emergency vehicles is important to the safety of first responders and the public by alerting drivers of an emergency or an emergency vehicle driving on a roadway.

Federal regulations play a significant role in shaping emergency vehicle lighting standards. While the DMV has the authority to address certain matters at the state level, see 23 V.S.A. §1252, it must also align with national guidelines to ensure consistency and interoperability across jurisdictions.

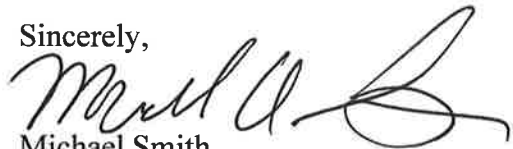
The use of flashing lights and sirens on emergency vehicles in Vermont is guided by established best practices that prioritize public safety. These best practices have been developed over years of experience and research on the federal level, and they strike a balance between timely response and minimizing risks to the public.

### **DECISION**

The Department of Motor Vehicles, as stated above, does not regulate the types of lights, or the flashing of lights, nor the decibel level of sirens, on emergency vehicles. It is possible that the Vermont Department of Public Safety may have additional input on this matter.

For the foregoing reasons, the Department of Motor Vehicles respectfully denies this petition for rulemaking to regulate flashing lights and sirens.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Smith", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Michael Smith  
Deputy Commissioner