

§ 20-125. Horns and warning devices.

(a) Every motor vehicle when operated upon a highway shall be equipped with a horn in good working order capable of emitting sound audible under normal conditions from a distance of not less than 200 feet, and it shall be unlawful, except as otherwise provided in this section, for any vehicle to be equipped with or for any person to use upon a vehicle any siren, compression or spark plug whistle or for any person at any time to use a horn otherwise than as a reasonable warning or to make any unnecessary or unreasonable loud or harsh sound by means of a horn or other warning device. All such horns and warning devices shall be maintained in good working order and shall conform to regulation not inconsistent with this section to be promulgated by the Commissioner.

(b) **(Effective until July 1, 2025)** Every vehicle owned or operated by a police department or by the Department of Public Safety including the State Highway Patrol or by the Wildlife Resources Commission or the Division of Marine Fisheries of the Department of Environmental Quality, or by the Division of Parks and Recreation of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, or by the North Carolina Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and used exclusively for law enforcement, firefighting, or other emergency response purposes, or by the Division of Emergency Management, or by a fire department, either municipal or rural, or by a fire patrol, whether such fire department or patrol be a paid organization or a voluntary association, vehicles used by an organ procurement organization or agency for the recovery and transportation of human tissues and organs for transplantation, and every ambulance or emergency medical service emergency support vehicle used for answering emergency calls, shall be equipped with special lights, bells, sirens, horns or exhaust whistles of a type approved by the Commissioner of Motor Vehicles.

The operators of all such vehicles so equipped are hereby authorized to use such equipment at all times while engaged in the performance of their duties and services, both within their respective corporate limits and beyond.

In addition to the use of special equipment authorized and required by this subsection, the chief and assistant chiefs of any police department or of any fire department, whether the same be municipal or rural, paid or voluntary, county fire marshals, assistant fire marshals, transplant coordinators, and emergency management coordinators, are hereby authorized to use such special equipment on privately owned vehicles operated by them while actually engaged in the performance of their official or semiofficial duties or services either within or beyond their respective corporate limits.

And vehicles driven by law enforcement officers of the North Carolina Division of Motor Vehicles shall be equipped with a bell, siren, or exhaust whistle of a type approved by the Commissioner, and all vehicles owned and operated by the State Bureau of Investigation for the use of its agents and officers in the performance of their official duties may be equipped with special lights, bells, sirens, horns or exhaust whistles of a type approved by the Commissioner of Motor Vehicles.

Every vehicle used or operated for law enforcement purposes by the sheriff or any salaried deputy sheriff or salaried rural policeman of any county, whether owned by the county or not, may be, but is not required to be, equipped with special lights, bells, sirens, horns or exhaust whistles of a type approved by the Commissioner of Motor Vehicles. Such special equipment shall not be operated or activated by any person except by a law enforcement officer while actively engaged in performing law enforcement duties.

In addition to the use of special equipment authorized and required by this subsection, the chief and assistant chiefs of each emergency rescue squad which is recognized or sponsored by any municipality or civil preparedness agency, are hereby authorized to use such special equipment on privately owned vehicles operated by them while actually engaged in their official

or semiofficial duties or services either within or beyond the corporate limits of the municipality which recognizes or sponsors such organization.

(b) **(Effective July 1, 2025)** Every vehicle owned or operated by a police department, the Department of Public Safety, the State Highway Patrol, the Wildlife Resources Commission, the Division of Marine Fisheries of the Department of Environmental Quality, the Division of Parks and Recreation of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, or the North Carolina Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and used exclusively for law enforcement, firefighting, or other emergency response purposes, or by the Division of Emergency Management, or by a fire department, either municipal or rural, or by a fire patrol, whether such fire department or patrol be a paid organization or a voluntary association, vehicles used by an organ procurement organization or agency for the recovery and transportation of human tissues and organs for transplantation, and every ambulance or emergency medical service emergency support vehicle used for answering emergency calls, shall be equipped with special lights, bells, sirens, horns or exhaust whistles of a type approved by the Commissioner of Motor Vehicles.

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(c) Repealed by Session Laws 1979, c. 653, s. 2. (1937, c. 407, s. 88; 1951, cc. 392, 1161; 1955, c. 1224; 1959, c. 166, s. 1; c. 494; c. 1170, s. 1; c. 1209; 1965, c. 257; 1975, c. 588; c. 734, s. 15; 1977, c. 52, s. 1; c. 438, s. 1; 1979, c. 653, s. 2; 1981, c. 964, s. 19; 1983, c. 32, s. 2; c. 768, s. 5; 1987, c. 266; 1989, c. 537; 1989 (Reg. Sess., 1990), c. 1020, s. 1; 1993 (Reg. Sess., 1994), c. 719, s. 2; 2011-145, s. 19.1(g); 2013-415, s. 1(a); 2015-241, s. 14.30(ee); 2024-57, s. 3E.2(l).)