



**CHP 884**  
**WARNING LAMPS FOR AUTHORIZED EMERGENCY VEHICLES**  
**AND SPECIAL HAZARD VEHICLES**

OPI 062 (Rev 6-06) (Destroy Previous Editions)

The provisions of the Vehicle Code (VC) relating to required and permitted warning lamps on vehicles are summarized herein. For more detailed information, a copy of the VC may be purchased from any office of the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) for a nominal fee. The VC is also available online at [www.dmv.ca.gov](http://www.dmv.ca.gov). The columns below indicate the types of warning lamps required or permitted on the vehicles listed. The display of red, amber, white, or blue warning lamps is authorized and/or restricted by the VC sections indicated in the right-hand column and those summarized on pages 4 and 5. Additional regulations pertaining to emergency warning lights may be obtained from California Code of Regulations, Title 13 (13 CCR). The full text of 13 CCR may be purchased from: Barclays Law Publishers, Attn: Client Services, P.O. Box 2006, San Francisco, CA 94126.

**REQUIRED LAMPS**

VEHICLES	MODE & COLOR	DIRECTION OF DISPLAY	VC SECTION
Authorized emergency vehicles	Steady Red	To front	25252, 21055
School buses	Flashing Red	To front and rear	25257
	Flashing Stop Arm	To front and rear	22112
	Flashing Amber	To front and rear	25257
Tow trucks	Flashing Amber	To front, sides or rear	25253

**PERMITTED LAMPS**

VEHICLES	MODE & COLOR	DIRECTION OF DISPLAY	VC SECTION
Authorized emergency vehicles	Steady Red	To front, sides, or rear	25252
	Flashing Red	To front, sides, or rear	25252
	Flashing Headlamps	To front	25252.5
	Two Flashing White	To front mounted above the roof line	25259
	Two Flashing White	To front mounted below the roof line and may be in addition to flashing headlamps	25259
	Flashing Amber	To front, sides, or rear	25259
	Flashing White	Directed to control official traffic control signals	25258

<p><b>Authorized emergency vehicles</b> operated <i>only</i> by <b>specified peace officers</b>: county sheriffs, undersheriffs, deputy sheriffs; city chiefs of police, police officers; chiefs of police, police officers of a district authorized by statute; municipal court marshals, deputy marshals; judicial district constables, deputy constables; port wardens, special officers of the Los Angeles Harbor Department; inspectors, investigators in the office of a district attorney; special agents, Attorney General investigators, designated assistant chiefs, deputy chiefs, chiefs, deputy directors, and division directors of the Department of Justice; members of the California Highway Patrol; members of the University of California Police Department; members of the State University police departments; members of the Law Enforcement Liaison Unit of the Department of Corrections; designated employees of the Department of Fish and Game; designated employees of the Department of Parks and Recreation; the director and designated employees of the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection; designated employees of the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control; designated local park rangers; members of community college police departments; members of school district police departments; members of the B.A.R.T. Police Department; harbor and port police officers; transit police officers; airport law enforcement officers; railroad police officers; Sergeants-at-Arms of the Legislature; bailiffs of the Supreme Court and of the courts of appeal, and coordinators of security for the judicial branch; designated county court</p>	Steady or Flashing Blue	To front, sides, or rear	25258
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service officers; members of the National Guard, when			
<b>VEHICLES</b>	<b>MODE &amp; COLOR</b>	<b>DIRECTION OF DISPLAY</b>	<b>VC SECTION</b>
involved in designated emergency activities; guards and messengers of the Treasurer's office; security officers of the Department of Justice; security officers of Hastings College of the Law; reserve peace officers. <i>Refer to VC and PC for specific details.</i>			
<b>Police or Traffic Officer</b>	Steady or Flashing White	To either side, mounted above the roof line	25259
<b>Tow trucks</b> , while providing service to a disabled vehicle	Flashing Amber	To front, sides, or rear	25253
<b>Tow trucks</b> , when towing vehicles and moving at speeds slower than normal traffic flow.	Flashing Amber	To the rear only	25253
<b>Publicly owned vehicles</b> operated by peace officer personnel of a marshal's department, in a county of 250,000 or more persons, when actually used in the <b>enforcement of orders of the courts</b> and when necessarily parked upon a roadway and such parking constitutes a hazard to other motorists.	Flashing Amber	To the rear only	25254
<b>Highway maintenance</b> , inspection, survey or construction vehicles used by highway authorities or duly authorized representatives thereof when such vehicles are parked or working on the highway.	Flashing Amber	To front, sides, or rear	25256
<b>Public utility vehicles</b> and vehicles of duly authorized representatives of public utilities when necessarily parked on highway or moving at a speed slower than normal traffic flow; public transit service vehicles when necessarily parked on the highway.	Flashing Amber	To front, sides, or rear	25260, 25301
<b>Vehicles</b> actually engaged in the construction, removal, maintenance, or inspection of any <b>oil or gas pipeline</b> when necessarily parked on a highway or when necessarily moving at a speed slower than the normal flow of traffic and only in accordance with Section 25268 VC.	Flashing Amber	To front, sides, or rear	25260.1
<b>County weed and pest control vehicles</b> actually engaged in weed control or pest detection, when necessarily parked on a highway or moving at speeds slower than normal traffic flow.	Flashing Amber	To front, sides, or rear	25261
<b>Vehicles with personnel aerial lift equipment</b> actually engaged in construction, removal, maintenance, or inspection of buildings, structures, or appurtenances thereto (including trimming of trees immediately adjacent) when necessarily parked on a highway or moving at speeds slower than normal traffic flow.	Flashing Amber	To front, sides, or rear	25260.3
<b>Armored cars</b>	Flashing or Steady Red	To front, sides, or rear; <i>only</i> while resisting armed robbery	25262
<b>Trucks</b> actually engaged in <b>towing of houses</b> or buildings upon any highway.	Flashing Amber	To front, sides, or rear of the vehicle or load	25263
<b>Coroner vehicles</b> at the scenes of violent highway deaths.	Flashing Amber	To front or rear only	25264
<b>Repair vehicles</b> of <b>sanitation districts</b> necessarily parked other than adjacent to the curb for purposes of repairing district facilities.	Flashing Amber	To front, sides, or rear; but not when vehicle is in motion	25265

<b>VEHICLES</b>	<b>MODE &amp; COLOR</b>	<b>DIRECTION OF DISPLAY</b>	<b>VC SECTION</b>
<b>Aqueduct or levee construction</b> , maintenance, patrol, or inspection vehicles owned and operated by the state and actually engaged in such work when parked on the traveled roadway so as to partially obstruct free flow of traffic or when moving at speeds slower than normal traffic flow.	Flashing Amber	To front, sides, or rear	25266
<b>Pest abatement vehicles</b> used by pest abatement districts when dispersing insecticides while the vehicles are parked or working on the highway.	Flashing Amber	To front or rear only	25267
<b>Pilot cars</b> required by a permit issued by highway authorities or any vehicle or combination of vehicles subject to such permit, if specified in the permit; warning lamps must be removed or covered when not escorting the permitted movement.	Flashing Amber	To front, sides, or rear	25270, 35780, 35790
<b>Vehicles</b> engaged in <b>herding livestock</b> along or across a public roadway or while stopped in the roadway near the livestock.	Flashing Amber	To front, sides, or rear	25270.5
<b>Pet ambulances</b> , publicly owned or operated by a corporation incorporated under Section 10400 of the Corporations Code for the purpose of prevention of cruelty to animals, when used for removing dead or injured animals or loose livestock, when necessarily parked on the roadway or moving at speeds slower than normal traffic flow.	Flashing Amber	To front or rear only	25271
Any <b>publicly owned vehicle</b> used for the enforcement of <b>animal control</b> laws contained in a statute, local ordinance, or regulation, when actually engaged in the enforcement of those laws and when necessarily parked on a roadway or moving at a speed slower than the normal flow of traffic.	Flashing Amber	To front, sides, or rear	25271.5
<b>Rural mail vehicles</b> while necessarily stopped or stopping upon a roadway for the delivery of U. S. mail.	Flashing Amber	To front or rear only	25272
<b>School district vehicles</b> owned and operated by a qualified school district while being used to measure the distance from school to a pupil's residence and when moving at a speed substantially slower than normal traffic flow.	Flashing Amber	To rear only	25273
<b>Cable television company vehicles</b> actually engaged in construction, removal, or maintenance of cable television facilities (including trimming of trees immediately adjacent) when necessarily parked on a highway or moving at speeds slower than normal traffic flow.	Flashing Amber	To front, sides, or rear	25274
<b>Truck or truck tractor</b> primarily used in transportation of <b>loads specified in Section 35414(a)</b> VC may display flashing lights only when the combination of vehicles and load exceeds 75 feet and when unusual traffic hazards exists.	Flashing Amber	To front, sides, or rear	25275, 35414
<b>Specified vehicles</b> , used by qualified organizations to transport <b>disabled persons</b> , while necessarily parked on a highway loading or unloading such persons.	Flashing Amber	To front, sides, or rear	25276
<b>Vehicles</b> used by <b>police department, sheriff's office</b> or other governmental agency for enforcement of <b>parking laws</b> or regulations when actually engaged in the enforcement of such laws and when necessarily stopped on a street or when	Flashing Amber	To front, sides, or rear	25277

moving at a speed slower than normal traffic flow.			
<b>VEHICLES</b>	<b>MODE &amp; COLOR</b>	<b>DIRECTION OF DISPLAY</b>	<b>VC SECTION</b>
<b>Vehicles</b> owned by <b>private security agencies</b> and operated exclusively on private roads to which the VC is applicable when responding to an emergency call for preservation of life or property. Vehicle may be operated on highways if vehicle is distinctively marked with "PRIVATE SECURITY" or "SECURITY PATROL." Lamps may not be activated while on highway unless specifically directed by a peace officer.	Flashing Amber	To front, sides, or rear	25279
<b>Trash collection vehicles</b> , operated by or under authority of a public entity, when engaged in trash collection or moving between stops at speeds of not more than 10 mph.	Flashing Amber	To front, sides, or rear	25280
<b>Hazardous substance spill response vehicles</b> under contract to the Department of Transportation may display <i>only</i> while engaged in spill clean up. Other times remove or cover.	Flashing Amber	To front, sides, or rear	25260.4
Only an <b>emergency response</b> or disaster service vehicle owned or leased and operated by the <b>American National Red Cross</b> , or any chapter or branch thereof, and equipped and clearly marked as a Red Cross emergency service or disaster service vehicle, may display flashing amber warning lights to the front, sides, or rear of the vehicle while at the scene of an emergency or disaster operation. Vehicles not used on emergency response shall not be included.	Flashing Amber	To front, sides, or rear	25259.5
<b>School buses</b> operated when visibility is reduced to 500 feet or less due to atmospheric conditions such as fog, rain, snow, smoke, or dust may use a flashing white strobe light.	Flashing White Strobe	To front, sides, or rear, mounted on the roof	25257.7
<b>Vehicles owned or operated by a contractor or a construction company</b> , licensed under the Business and Professions Code, if the vehicle is engaged in any phase of a construction project performed on or in the immediate vicinity of a highway, may display while parked on the highway or moving at a speed slower than the normal flow of traffic.	Flashing Amber	To front, sides, or rear	25282

### SUMMARIZED VEHICLE CODE PROVISIONS

The number(s) in parentheses following the paragraph title indicates the Vehicle Code section(s) summarized.

**Legislative Policy (30).** "It is declared as a matter of legislative policy that red lights and sirens on vehicles should be restricted to authorized emergency vehicles engaged in police, fire and lifesaving services; and that other types of vehicles which are engaged in activities which create special hazards upon the highways should be equipped with flashing amber warning lamps."

**Authorized Emergency Vehicle: Defined (165).** "An authorized emergency vehicle is:

(a) Any publicly owned and operated ambulance, lifeguard, or lifesaving equipment or any privately owned or operated ambulance licensed by the Commissioner of the California Highway Patrol to operate in response to emergency calls.

(b) Any publicly owned vehicle operated by the following persons, agencies, or organizations:

(1) Any federal, state, or local agency, department or district employing peace officers as that term is defined in Chapter 4.5

(commencing with Section 830) of Part 2 of Title 3 of the Penal Code, for use by those officers in the performance of their duties.

(2) Any forestry or fire department of any public agency or fire department organized as provided in the Health and Safety Code.

(c) Any vehicle owned by the state, or any bridge and highway district, and equipped and used either for fighting fires, or towing or servicing other vehicles, caring for injured persons, or repairing damaged lighting or electrical equipment.

(d) Any state-owned vehicle used in responding to emergency fire, rescue or communications calls and operated either by the Office of Emergency Services or by any public agency or industrial fire department to which the Office of Emergency Services has assigned the vehicle.

(e) Any vehicle owned or operated by any department or agency of the United States government when the vehicle is used in responding to emergency fire, ambulance, or lifesaving calls or is actively engaged in law enforcement work.

(f) Any vehicle for which an authorized emergency vehicle permit has been issued by the Commissioner of the California Highway Patrol.”

**Use of Flashing Amber Warning Light (25268).** “No person shall display a flashing amber warning light on a vehicle as permitted by this code except when an unusual traffic hazard exists.”

**Use of Red Warning Light (25269).** “No person shall display a flashing or steady burning red warning light on a vehicle except as permitted by Section 21055 VC or when an extreme hazard exists.”

*NOTE:* These sections mean that the use of warning lamps shall be restricted to situations where warning to other vehicles is essential to provide for the safe movement of traffic. Any unnecessary use of the lamps is not only in violation of the law but decreases the effectiveness of the lamps and confuses the public.

**Maximum Number of Lamps (24405).** “(a) Not more than four lamps of the following types showing to the front of a vehicle may be lighted at any one time:

- (1) Headlamps.
- (2) Auxiliary driving or passing lamps.
- (3) Fog lamps.
- (4) Warning lamps.
- (5) Spot lamps.
- (6) Gaseous discharge lamps specified in Section 25258.

(b) For the purpose of this section each pair of a dual headlamp system shall be considered as one lamp.

(c) Subdivision (a) does not apply to any authorized emergency vehicle.”

**Vehicle With Unlawful Lamps (24003).** “No vehicle shall be equipped with any lamp or illuminating device not required or permitted in this code, nor shall any lamp or illuminating device be mounted inside a vehicle unless specifically permitted by this code....” Warning lamps meeting requirements established by the CHP may be mounted inside an authorized emergency vehicle.

**Unlawful Equipment (24005, 26100).** No person shall install, sell for use, or use on a vehicle any warning lamp that does not comply with requirements established by the California Highway Patrol.

**Flashing Lights (25250).** “Flashing lights are prohibited on vehicles except as otherwise permitted.”

**Utility Flood and Loading Lamps (25110).** “(a) The following vehicles may be equipped with utility flood or loading lamps mounted on the rear, and sides, that project a white light illuminating an area to the side or rear of the vehicle for a distance not to exceed 75 feet at the level of the roadway:

(1) Tow trucks that are used to tow disabled vehicles may display utility floodlights, but only during the period of preparation for towing at the location from which a disabled vehicle is to be towed.

(2) Ambulances used to respond to emergency calls may display utility flood and loading lights, but only at the scene of an emergency or while loading or unloading patients.

(3) Firefighting equipment designed and operated exclusively as such may display utility floodlamps only at the scene of an emergency.

(4) Vehicles used by law enforcement agencies or organizations engaged in the detoxification of alcoholics may display utility flood or loading lights when loading or unloading persons under the influence of intoxicants for transportation to detoxification centers or places of incarceration.

(5) Vehicles used by law enforcement agencies for mobile blood alcohol testing, drug evaluation, or field sobriety testing.

(6) Vehicles used by publicly or privately owned public utilities may display utility flood or loading lights when engaged in emergency roadside repair of electric, gas, telephone, telegraph, water, or sewer facilities.

(b) Lamps permitted under subdivision (a) shall not be lighted during darkness, except while the vehicle is parked, nor project any glaring light into the eyes of an approaching driver.”

**Spotlamps (24404).** “(a) A motor vehicle may be equipped with not to exceed two white spotlamps, which shall not be used in substitution of headlamps.

(b) No spotlamp shall be equipped with any lamp source exceeding 32 standard candlepower or 30 watts nor project any glaring light into the eyes of an approaching driver.

(c) Every spotlamp shall be so directed when in use: That no portion of the main substantially parallel beam of light will strike the roadway to the left of the prolongation of the left side line of the vehicle. That the top of the beam will not strike the roadway at a distance in excess of 300 feet from the vehicle.

(d) This section does not apply to spotlamps on authorized emergency vehicles.

(e) No spotlamp when in use shall be directed so as to illuminate any other moving vehicle.”