



Motor Vehicle Accidents

Unfortunately, vehicle crashes occur. Most often citizens will be at the scene of the crash before fire units are there and it is important that they know what to do correctly or, in some cases, what not to do.

- ❑ Be sure that someone has called 9-1-1. If you are not sure how to do this, follow this link: <http://www.catawbacountync.gov/depts/communic>.
- ❑ Is the scene itself life-threatening? For example, a car hits a tanker that is now leaking an unknown substance. Since you are dealing with an unknown, the patient should immediately be removed a safe distance from the leak regardless of his condition. As best as possible, however, immobilize the patient's head and neck during movement.
- ❑ If the scene is not immediately life-threatening, assess the patient's condition and manage critical situations first. Does the patient have a clear airway? Is the patient breathing? Is there excessive bleeding? If there is excessive bleeding anywhere, apply direct pressure to the wound with a dry, clean cloth.
- ❑ If you know CPR, and the patient needs it, administer it immediately. If there is no immediate danger to the patient do not move them. Keep the patient in the vehicle until fire units can get on the scene. There may be spinal damage of which you are unaware and movement by the patient could only make it worse. Many times, people who have just been in a car crash will want to jump out of the car and move about. As best as you are able, keep them still.
- ❑ The scene can be a combination of environmental hazards such as downed electrical wires, unknown substance leakage, gasoline spills, or fire. If you are on the scene before law enforcement officers or fire units, be aware of such dangers. Protect yourself; you are no good to anyone if you get hurt!
- ❑ Often, spilled gasoline is present. Do not allow any smoking around the vehicle. Turn all vehicle ignitions off.
- ❑ If the car is on fire and firefighting personnel have not yet arrived, decide if you can remove the passengers quickly enough or whether you should fight the fire. If the passengers are not trapped, move them first. If they cannot be extricated quickly, try to put out the fire with either a class B or multipurpose portable extinguisher. The main cause of most vehicle fires after a crash is a ruptured fuel tank or fuel lines that have been ignited by internal or external sources. The most common ignition point, however, is under the hood, which rarely presents a serious hazard to vehicle occupants unless combustion is enhanced by gasoline. Most underhood fires will not spread unless fueled by an external source.
- ❑ Once emergency units do arrive, tell them what you know and then get out of their way. They are trained professionals and know what to do from that point.

For more information on motor vehicle accidents, you can contact the City of Newton Fire Department at 828-695-4314.