

CODE THREE

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“CODE THREE! Lights & Siren”

by Bob (Ram) Muessig

True story: a five-year old girl suffering a severe asthma attack was transported by ambulance to a hospital, her frantic mother riding with her while EMTs tried desperately to keep her alive. Well, they couldn't. She was pronounced dead at the hospital. The ambulance couldn't get her there in time. Why not? Traffic...heavy traffic...and inattentive drivers. People just didn't get out of the way.

We've been so de-sensitized to the noises around us when we're driving that we don't see flashing lights or hear sirens on emergency vehicles. All too frequently, our focus is **inside** our vehicle, not **outside**. Those lights and sirens have to compete with kids in the back seat, radios blaring, conversations with passengers, and conversations on cell phones. Then there are those who read magazines and newspapers – would you believe books? while driving. They're not paying attention to **anything**...period. (Those are the ones who you wish would get a ticket longer than a witches' dream and have to spend every night in traffic school from now until the next ice age.)

So: time to review the basics. First, second, and third: **PAY ATTENTION!**

Knowing what's going on around you is **important**. It's what comes out of left field that can hurt you...or somebody else. Truckers know this. They check the rear-view mirrors and spot mirrors constantly, plus gauges. Pilots know this. They not only check ahead & behind and left & right, but also above & below; plus instruments. **You** should be doing all those things, too. (Fortunately, you've only got 'ahead & behind and left & right' to be concerned about, so your job should be a little easier!) Professional drivers – ground and air – know the condition of their vehicle and what is happening around them – in all directions – all the time.

What can you do about the distractions?

✚ If you have kids in the car, make sure they've got something to do. And set the ground rules. When I was a child, my mother would caution me: “Daddy needs to drive – don't bother him.” (This sets a good example for the kids, also. The message is: safety is important.)

✚ If you have other passengers and you're engaged in conversation, make sure that you keep your eyes on the road, the mirrors, and the instruments. If traffic gets fierce, **stop talking!**

✚ When the cell phone or pager goes off, if driving needs your attention, **don't answer it!** (What a concept.) Look for a place to get off the road. **Then** answer it. Some states have already implemented laws making it illegal to talk on the cell phone while driving; the rest may follow suit. If you need to make a call, get off the road first. The couple of minutes you lose aren't all that important.

✚ Keep the radio down low enough so you can hear a horn or a siren.

What do you do when you see flashing lights and/or hear a siren? Back to driving 101. **Give a turn signal and pull safely over to the right as soon as you possibly can. STOP. Get out of the way.** Look and listen...**all the time.** Ambulances may be on their way to pick someone up or heading to a hospital with a life already on board. In a heart attack, time is muscle. In trauma, there is a “golden hour” in which a life may be saved. Fire and police vehicles running with lights and siren have more urgent business than you do. Law enforcement officers, EMTs, and

fire truck drivers take their lives in their hands every time they're on the street or highway. Drivers cut in front of them, slow them down, change lanes suddenly, and generally make their lives miserable. Do them the courtesy of allowing them to do their jobs. Assist them by staying out of their way.

Driving is a **full-time job**. It takes concentration. They pay people to do it. Like marriage, it should not be entered into lightly. The responsibilities you assume when you get behind the wheel are literally those of life and death. The welfare of every living thing around you rests in your eyes and ears and hands. Need another reason to stay alert? It could be **your** home that's on fire; or **your** husband in that wreck. It could be **you** – or **your** wife, or **your** grandson, or **your** daughter, or **your** mom – in that ambulance. Think about it.

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