

Southern Pines Police Department
Safety Tips
Motor Vehicle Crashes

If you are involved in a car crash will you know what to do? Your safety and that of the motoring public will be paramount, along with information gathering from the parties involved. One needs to know what to ask for and what to write down when involved in a car crash. Of course the best method is to do your best to avoid a crash by driving safely and with due care for the roadway conditions.

Let us assume you were involved in a minor car crash with one other vehicle where the vehicles have their fenders dented. The first thing to do is to move the involved vehicles off of the road. Move as far off the road as possible or pull into a parking lot. Police officers do not need to see the exact placement of the cars to complete an accurate police report. First, ascertain that no injuries are involved. If injuries are involved then immediately contact 911 for an ambulance; otherwise call 911 for a police response. Make no statements about the accident to anyone except the police. **Keep in mind police reports are not mandatory for accidents where the damage is less than \$1,000 and there is no serious injury, death or public property damage. The vehicle owners must exchange information and then contact their insurance companies if not involving the police.**

What information should you collect from another driver involved in a crash? The same information a police officer would ask for. Write down the other driver's name, address, phone number, insurance company, policy number, driver's license number, vehicle plate number, year, and make of vehicle. **If the damage to the vehicles exceeds \$1,000 then the vehicle owners must file an additional report with the Division of Motor Vehicles.** However, it is highly recommended that a police officer always be called to the scene. Why? Because there are many people who drive with suspended licenses or registrations, improper plates or no insurance. The private citizen can not validate someone's information by simply looking at it. A police officer should always be involved to protect you from the less-than-honest-driver.

If a person stops by to assist you at a car crash scene ask if they witnessed the accident. If they did, then ask for their name and phone number to assist the police officer in their investigation. If the other driver involved offers you money or arrangements to repair your car, refuse. Once you accept any settlement then the issue will become a civil matter and repairs to your car may never take place.

Being involved in a car accident can be very traumatic and stressful. Knowing what to do if involved will help alleviate the stress. Remember any property damage, even to a lawn, mailbox or other property, requires the vehicle owner to exchange information with the owner involved. **If the exchange of information does not take place then you can be charged with violating the North Carolina General Statutes for leaving the scene of a property damage accident. This is a serious offense with expensive fines and points to your license.** The best course of action is to always involve the police no matter how minor the car crash. This practice will guarantee that everyone exchanges valid and proper information. The bottom line is always call 911 for an officer and get off the road as quickly as possible for your safety. Be aware of other traffic on the highway and be safe!

For more information or a presentation on this topic, contact the Community Services Coordinator at (910) 692-2732.