

Press Release

Findings from the DEKRA Road Safety Report 2026

High crash risk for emergency responders

- ▶ Dangerous moments on the road and at the response site
- ▶ Stress and high speeds increase the risk of accidents
- ▶ Regulated additional training should be mandatory

Saving lives on the road – and getting into an accident themselves in the process: that is sometimes the harsh reality. “Emergency responders from the police, fire department, and emergency medical services are exposed to particular dangers on the road”, confirms DEKRA accident researcher Markus Egelhaaf. This applies both to the trips associated with emergency calls and to the work on-site itself. There is therefore an urgent need for action. The DEKRA Road Safety Report 2026 highlights specific potential for improvement.

While flashing lights and sirens signal other road users to immediately clear the way, many emergency responders find themselves in a dangerous dilemma: Every second at the scene can mean the difference between life and death, but driving fast significantly increases the risk of an accident. Crashes often occur because other road users misjudge the situation or fail to notice the audible warning signals in time – or at all.

In its statement in the DEKRA Road Safety Report 2026, the International Firefighters’ Federation (CITF) recommends the use of Vehicle-to-Everything (V2X) communication systems in the future. These systems can automatically warn appropriately equipped road users of approaching emergency vehicles, thereby helping to prevent crashes during response trips.

But there are also challenges on the part of emergency responders themselves. Uncertainty or feeling overwhelmed in demanding driving situations can increase the risk of accidents. “In emergency medical services in particular, response vehicles are often driven by younger and less experienced individuals. In the case of volunteers, this is compounded by the fact that they don’t often drive such vehicles and even more rarely do so under emergency conditions”, says Markus Egelhaaf. Against this backdrop, the DEKRA accident researcher advocates for a government-regulated additional qualification, such as the one that exists in Norway, for example. There, the

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training covers topics such as driving physics, hazard awareness, stress management, and legal responsibility. Spain could also serve as a model, where the ability to conduct emergency drives is an integral part of professional certification. A driver's license alone is not sufficient.

A high-risk workplace

In addition to the hazards while driving, there are also risks at the emergency scene itself. Data from the U.S. illustrates this: There, approximately 30 percent of police officers or firefighters killed in traffic accidents were struck by other road users at the scene of an emergency. These accidents typically occur while securing accident scenes, during traffic stops, or while working in the immediate vicinity of moving traffic.

"The risks to life and limb are increased further by unclear danger zones, darkness, and adverse weather conditions", notes Michael Mertens, deputy chairman of the German Police Union (GdP), in his statement in the DEKRA Road Safety Report 2026. Added to this are vehicles traveling too fast for the conditions, a lack of comprehensive traffic management systems (ideally in digital form), and insufficient consideration of shoulders or safe areas in traffic infrastructure plans. "When taken together, all this turns our roads into a high-risk workplace", says Mertens. He calls on policymakers and government agencies to create framework conditions that enable emergency responders to work in a noticeably safer environment.

Another safety risk lies in the patient compartment of ambulances: During the trip to the hospital, medical care is often provided, which places high demands on personnel, equipment, and freedom of movement, significantly increasing the risk of injury. However, according to various U.S. studies, restraint systems are rarely used consistently: Only about 3 percent of emergency responders surveyed stated that they always wear a seat belt during patient transport. In contrast, more than a third reported that they never use a seat belt. The respondents cited as a key reason that the restraint systems used in ambulances significantly restrict the provision of medical care, particularly for critically ill or seriously injured patients. The DEKRA Road Safety Report therefore presents, among other things, a new restraint system designed to better protect medical personnel even while they are treating patients. "We need to put such systems into practice quickly", says the DEKRA accident researcher.

In conclusion: Emergency responders save lives – but their own protection is often inadequate. Modern technology, clear rules, and better training are crucial for making the road a safer workplace.

Further background information on this topic, as well as on many other aspects related to “Working in Road Traffic”, can be found in the DEKRA Road Safety Report 2026. It is available online at www.dekra-roadsafety.com.



About DEKRA

For more than 100 years, DEKRA has been a trusted name in safety. Founded in 1925 with the original goal of improving road safety through vehicle inspections, DEKRA has grown to become the world's largest independent, non-listed expert organization in the field of testing, inspection, and certification. Today, as a global partner, the company supports its customers with comprehensive services and solutions to drive safety and sustainability forward. In 2025, DEKRA generated revenue of 4.4 billion euros. More than 48,000 employees are providing qualified and independent expert services in approximately 60 countries across five continents. DEKRA holds a Platinum rating from EcoVadis, placing it among the top 1% of the world's most sustainable companies.