



**House
Legislative
Analysis
Section**

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VEHICLE FLASHING LIGHTS

House Bill 4151 as enrolled
Second Analysis (7-8-94)

Sponsor: Rep. Dianne Byrum
House Committee: Transportation
Senate Committee: Transportation &
Tourism

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Some people feel that several provisions of the Michigan Vehicle Code need to be changed or clarified regarding the use of flashing, oscillating, or rotating lights on various types of emergency, commercial, or official vehicles. Under the act, the use or possession of flashing, oscillating or rotating red, blue or amber lights specifically is prohibited, except under specified circumstances. It has been pointed out that this provision may be insufficient to prevent the unauthorized use of other colors of flashers. It also has been pointed out that the act fails to include volunteer fire-fighting vehicles among those that are permitted to use flashing white lights, even though other fire and emergency vehicles are allowed to use such lights in emergency situations. In addition, some people think that the current authorization to use amber flashers should be extended to additional types of vehicles, such as a hearse or farm equipment, to provide a cautionary warning to drivers approaching them and protection for those who drive them. Further, Public Act 335 of 1990 amended the act to permit the driver of a vehicle used to collect or haul trash to use amber flashers. It has been suggested that this provision should specify that only vehicles licensed as a business for this purpose could qualify to use them.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the Michigan Vehicle Code to revise the act's regulations regarding the use of flashing lights on various types of emergency, commercial or official vehicles. Specifically, the bill would allow an authorized emergency vehicle to display flashing, rotating or oscillating white lights in conjunction with an authorized emergency light as prescribed in the act, but would clarify that the use or possession of flashing, oscillating or rotating lights of any color would be prohibited except as otherwise provided or under conditions specified in the act.

In addition, the bill would add the following vehicles to the current list of vehicles that may be equipped with a flashing amber light:

- * A hearse or funeral coach;
- * A motor vehicle while engaged in escorting or transporting an oversize load that had been issued a permit by state or local authorities;
- * A vehicle owned by the National Guard or a U.S. military vehicle while traveling under military authority;
- * A vehicle while towing an implement of husbandry; and
- * Implements of husbandry.

A vehicle used for the cleanup of spills or a necessary emergency response action taken pursuant to state or federal law, or operated by an employee of the Department of Natural Resources who responded to a spill, emergency response action, complaint or compliance activity could be equipped with flashing amber lights, as long as the lights were not activated unless the vehicle were at the scene of a spill, action, complaint or compliance activity.

Currently, the act allows a vehicle used in the collection and hauling of refuse to use flashing amber lights. The bill provides that to use an amber light, the vehicle would have to be owned or leased by a licensed business.

And finally, the act specifies the color that a lamp or reflector must be on the front, sides or rear of a vehicle, other than those expressly required or permitted under the act. The bill provides that, unless both covered and unlit, a vehicle could not be equipped with a lamp or a part designed to be a

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reflector unless the lamp or part designed to be a reflector were expressly required or permitted under the act or met federal standards.

MCL 257.698

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

The Senate Fiscal Agency reports that the bill would not affect state or local budget expenditures. (3-17-94)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Representatives of a wide range of local and state agencies have pointed out several weaknesses or inconsistencies in the Michigan Vehicle Code's provisions regarding flashing lights on vehicles. The bill would eliminate needless confusion and clarify the regulations for using flashing lights on vehicles by prohibiting the use of flashing, oscillating or rotating lights of any color, except as provided under conditions specified in the act. The additional specifications of, and restrictions on, vehicles that may carry and use certain colors of flashing lights would help promote safety in a variety of driving or standing situations involving emergency, commercial or other official vehicles.

Against:

Expanding the list of vehicles that could use amber flashers would lead to more vehicles using them on the state's roadways, which in turn could reduce the "warning value" of such flashers among the general driving public.