| Police Scotland logo | Freedom of Information Response Our reference: FOI 25-2129  Responded to: 29th July 2025 |
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Your recent request for information is replicated below, together with our response.

## I would like to request the following information regarding the legal use and enforcement of blue lights by private ambulance services operating within Scotland nothing that there are currently no Private Ambulances authorised to use "Blue Lights" under NHS Dispatch contracts (999 response):

## 1. Policy & Enforcement

## a. What is Police Scotland’s current policy or internal guidance on the use of blue lights by private ambulance companies not operating under an NHS 999 dispatch contract?

## b. How does Police Scotland define "authorised emergency response" in the context of private ambulance use?

Police Scotland cannot provide legal advice in relation to this matter and you should consider seeking independent legal advice if / as appropriate.

In respect of private ambulances at public events, our working understanding is that there is nothing at law to prevent an event organiser engaging the services of a private ambulance contractor. In the absence of specific legislation to the contrary, it is also legal to use a private ambulance on a road with emergency equipment activated, in certain circumstances.

The decision to utilise emergency equipment on any vehicle rests with the driver and is one which they must be in a position to justify. Where a statutory exemption is claimed following the detection of an offence involving a private ambulance it will be a matter for the court to decide on the legitimacy of this position.

Legislation and regulations governing private ambulances

‘Ambulance’ is defined under two separate pieces of legislation, as follows; Regulation 3 of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986:

‘A motor vehicle which is specifically designed and constructed (and not merely adapted) for carrying, has permanently fixed to the vehicle equipment used for medical, dental or other health purposes and is used primarily for the carriage of persons suffering from illness, injury or disability.’

Schedule 2 of the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994:

‘Ambulance’ means a vehicle which - a) is constructed or adapted for, and used for no purpose other than, the carriage of sick, injured or disabled people to or from welfare centres or places where medical or dental treatment is given, and b) is readily identifiable as a vehicle used for the carriage of such people being marked ‘Ambulance’ on both sides.’

Road traffic exemptions

Section 87 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, as amended, creates exemptions for vehicles being used for fire brigade, ambulance or police purposes, from speed limits in certain circumstances. It is therefore the purpose to which the vehicle is being used which is the key factor in determining whether or not the driver can claim such exemption.

The term "ambulance purposes" is not defined by the legislation. The drafting of the legislation is such that it can be interpreted as including non-NHS (i.e. private) ambulances when being used for ambulance purposes.

## 2. Offences & Investigations

## a. How many incidents, investigations, or enforcement actions (e.g., warnings, fines, charges) have been recorded by Police Scotland in the past 3 years (2022–2025 to date) involving:

## - Improper or unauthorised use of blue lights by private ambulance services?

## - Vehicles fitted with emergency lighting that were not engaged in lawful emergency response?

## b. Please break these figures down by year and region if possible.

Unfortunately, I estimate that it would cost well in excess of the current FOI cost threshold of £600 to process your request. I am therefore refusing to provide the information sought in terms of section 12(1) of the Act - Excessive Cost of Compliance.

By way of explanation, Police Scotland does not maintain a central register of incidents, investigations or enforcement actions in relation to such alleged offences.

To provide an accurate response would require the manual inspection of the notebooks of all Local Policing and Road Policing Officers, to ascertain if they had dealt with a relevant incident or enquiry during the requested period and its outcome, plus a manual examination of all potentially related incidents within our call handling system, which does not have call closure codes specific enough to isolate such incidents, together with a manual examination of all potentially related crime reports. Our crime system provides no automated method of isolating relevant private ambulance offences from those relating to other private vehicles etc. and as such, a review of crime reports alone would cost well in excess of the current FOI cost threshold.

## 3. Communications to Private Ambulance Companies

## a. What steps, if any, does Police Scotland take to educate or warn private ambulance companies about the lawful limits of blue light use?

## b. Has Police Scotland issued any official guidance, letters, or notices to companies known to advertise or display blue light vehicles when not contracted or authorised to use them?

Relevant guidance has been published on the Police Scotland website per the response to Question 1, and is also provided to event organisers, private ambulance providers etc. on request.

As outlined above, Police Scotland cannot provide legal advice in relation to this matter and you should consider seeking independent legal advice if/ as appropriate.

Any allegation made to Police Scotland in relation to such offences will be investigated and appropriate action taken.

## 4. Reporting Channels

## a. What is the appropriate method for a member of the public or NHS official to report suspected misuse of blue lights by private ambulance services?

Members of the public can report suspected misuse of blue lights by private ambulance services by contacting 101, or 999 in an emergency, or by using the online ‘Contact Us’ portal.

Members of the public can also make a report by attending at their local police office. Further information regarding contact methods are outlined on the Police Scotland website: [Contact Police Scotland - Police Scotland](https://www.scotland.police.uk/contact-us/)

## b. Are there any designated officers, units, or processes that deal with this type of offence?

Officers from the Road Policing Department will assist any Local Policing colleague in dealing with such matters as required, or would assume ownership of such enquiries if / as appropriate to the presenting circumstances.

If you require any further assistance, please contact us quoting the reference above.

You can request a review of this response within the next 40 working days by [email](mailto:foi@scotland.police.uk) or by letter (Information Management - FOI, Police Scotland, Clyde Gateway, 2 French Street, Dalmarnock, G40 4EH). Requests must include the reason for your dissatisfaction.

If you remain dissatisfied following our review response, you can appeal to the Office of the Scottish Information Commissioner (OSIC) within 6 months - [online](https://www.foi.scot/appeal), by [email](mailto:enquiries@foi.scot) or by letter (OSIC, Kinburn Castle, Doubledykes Road, St Andrews, KY16 9DS).

Following an OSIC appeal, you can appeal to the Court of Session on a point of law only.

This response will be added to our [Disclosure Log](http://www.scotland.police.uk/access-to-information/freedom-of-information/disclosure-log) in seven days' time.

Every effort has been taken to ensure our response is as accessible as possible. If you require this response to be provided in an alternative format, please let us know.