

Accident Victim Assistance

Educational Content

Practical, plain step-by-step guide for what victims and families should do after a fatal accident (vehicle, workplace, or other incident) in the United States laws vary by state, so consulting with an experienced personal injury lawyer is essential.

1. Immediate Emergency Actions

If you are at or near the scene:

- 1.Ensure your own safety and do not put yourself in further danger.
- 2.Call 911 to report the accident and request police and EMS; fatal or suspected-fatal crashes must be reported in every state.
- 3.Follow instructions from first responders; do not interfere with rescue efforts or investigations.
- 4.If asked, provide basic identifying information and what you witnessed, but avoid speculating about fault at the scene.

If you are notified later:

Ask which agency is handling the investigation (police department, highway patrol, OSHA, etc.) and get the case or report number.

2. Preserve evidence right away

Key evidence disappears fast, so early preservation is critical for any later legal claim.

- 1.Get the incident or crash report number from law enforcement and note the investigating agency.
- 2.If possible, photograph or video: vehicles, roadway, skid marks, debris, weather/lighting, surrounding area, or any hazards that contributed.
- 3.Collect names, phone numbers, and emails of witnesses, including passengers, bystanders, and nearby businesses that may have cameras
- 4.Keep physical items: damaged clothing, helmet, phone, glasses, or work equipment; store them in a safe place and do not clean or repair them.
- 5.Ask that involved vehicles or equipment not be destroyed or repaired until an attorney reviews them; a lawyer can send preservation (“spoliation”) letters to towing yards, employers, trucking companies, or property owners.
- 6.Identify possible video sources (dash cams, traffic cameras, business security systems, home doorbell cameras) and act quickly, as many systems overwrite in days.

3. Take care of immediate family needs

The first few days are about both practical and emotional stability.

- 1.Identify and notify close family (spouse, children, parents, siblings) in a private, safe setting.
- 2.Ask a trusted person (relative, close friend, clergy) to help with calls, logistics, and childcare so the immediate next of kin is not doing everything alone.
- 3.Coordinate with the medical examiner or coroner about:

- Where your loved one’s body is located
- When an autopsy will occur (in many fatal accidents, an autopsy is ordered automatically)
- When and how the body can be released to a funeral home

- 4.Contact a funeral home to begin arrangements but avoid signing long-term financial commitments until you know about life insurance and possible legal claims.
- 5.Reach out to counseling, clergy, or victim assistance services; many law enforcement agencies and prosecutors’ offices have victim advocate programs

Disclaimer: This material is for general educational purposes only and is not a substitute for professional advice.