How Crash Reports and Dashcam Video Shape an Auto Accident Claim

The evidence in a car crash claim starts to scatter within hours. Vehicles get towed and repaired, video gets recorded over and witnesses become hard to reach. A car accident attorney typically starts with the police report, photos, video and the data stored in the vehicles. Here is how each source fits into a claim.

What the police report contains

When officers respond to a crash, they usually prepare a crash report, sometimes called a police report. It typically lists the drivers and vehicles involved, with insurance details for each, and it often includes a diagram, a short narrative and any citations. Many states also require drivers to report crashes that involve injury, death or property damage above a set amount. Copies usually come from the responding agency, such as a city police department, a sheriff's office or the state highway patrol, sometimes for a fee.

A crash report is influential in insurance claims, but it is not the final word on fault. States differ on whether an officer's opinions can be used at trial. When a report has a factual error, such as a wrong plate number, the agency may accept a request to correct or supplement it. A car crash attorney will check the report against the photos and statements.

Video and photo evidence

Dashcam footage can capture the seconds before a crash better than a witness can. Keep the original file with its timestamp, instead of a phone recording of the screen, and make a backup copy. Traffic cameras and nearby businesses may also have recorded the crash, but many systems overwrite footage within days or weeks. Photos taken at the scene show vehicle positions, debris, skid marks and road signs, ***Car Accident Lawyers Wiki*** while photos of injuries taken over several weeks can document healing.

The event data recorder

Many cars and light trucks carry an event data recorder (EDR). NHTSA describes an EDR as a device that records technical vehicle and occupant information for a brief period, measured in seconds, not minutes, surrounding a crash. Depending on the vehicle, the data may include speed and brake application as well as seat belt use. NHTSA's rule in 49 CFR Part 563 sets requirements for EDRs in light vehicles that have them. Under the Driver Privacy Act of 2015, EDR data generally belongs to the vehicle owner or lessee, and others may access it only in limited situations, such as with the owner's consent or a court order.

EDR data can be lost when a car is repaired or sold for salvage. Insurers often move a total loss vehicle to a salvage auction quickly, so an automobile accident attorney may send a preservation letter asking the insurer or tow yard to hold the vehicle until the data can be downloaded.

Witnesses and medical records

Independent witnesses carry weight because they have no stake in the claim. Collect their names and phone numbers at the scene when it is safe. Medical records connect the injuries to the crash, and insurers often point to gaps in treatment to dispute a claim. Keeping the claim number in one place, with a log of each call to the adjuster, makes later questions easier to answer. Pain levels, missed work and appointments are worth

noting in a journal while the details are fresh. This article is general information, not legal advice, and it does not predict the result of any claim.