How Crash Reports and Dashcam Video Shape an Auto Accident Claim

The evidence in caraccidentlawyers.wiki a car crash claim starts to scatter within hours. Vehicles get towed and repaired, video is overwritten and witnesses become hard to reach. A car accident lawyer typically starts with the police report and any photos or video, then the data stored in the vehicles. This article explains how each source fits into a claim.

The crash report

Officers who respond to a crash usually prepare a crash report, often called a police report. It usually records who was driving each vehicle and which insurer covers it, and it often includes a diagram, a short narrative and any citations. In many states, drivers must also report crashes involving injury, death or property damage above a set dollar amount. Copies usually come from the responding agency, whether that is a city police department, a sheriff's office or the state highway patrol, sometimes for a fee.

Insurers rely heavily on the crash report, but it is not the final word on fault. States differ on whether an officer's opinions can be used at trial. If the report contains a factual error, such as a wrong plate number, the agency may accept a request for a correction or a supplement. A car crash attorney will compare the report with the photos and statements.

Photos and dashcam footage

Dashcam footage can capture the seconds before a crash more clearly than any witness. Keep the original file with its timestamp, instead of a phone recording of the screen, and store 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, while photos of injuries taken over several weeks can document healing.

What the vehicle itself recorded

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, around the time of a crash. Depending on the vehicle, it may record speed and braking, along with 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. Total loss vehicles are often moved to salvage auctions within weeks, so a car accident attorney may send a preservation letter asking that the vehicle be held until the data is 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 link the injuries to the crash, and gaps in treatment are often used by insurers to dispute a claim. A simple file with the claim number and a log of every call with the adjuster makes later questions easier to answer. A short journal of pain levels and missed work, written

while the details are fresh, can also help. This article is general information, not legal advice, and it does not predict the result of any claim.