

Who Is at Fault for a Left-Turn Accident at a Busy Intersection?

Our Houston car accident lawyers are here to level the playing field after a left-turn crash

The yellow light hits. You're sitting at an intersection in Houston, and you've got a left turn to make. You check for oncoming traffic. Everything looks clear, so you start the turn. Then a vehicle you didn't see, moving faster than you expected, crashes into the driver's side of your car.

Your first thought may be: "They must have run the red light." But then you remember something you heard – that the left-turning driver always gets blamed.

That's an assumption many people make. Insurance companies love this assumption because it makes their lives easier. Left-turn [car accidents](#) are among the most common collision types in Texas, and insurance companies have perfected the art of automatically blaming the turning driver while barely investigating whether that blame is actually justified.

The problem is that many left-turning drivers accept this predetermined guilt without fighting back. In Texas, that fight can mean the difference between recovering your damages and walking away with nothing.

Why do left-turn car accidents happen?

Left-turn crashes usually aren't "freak accidents." They happen for predictable reasons, often tied to split-second judgment calls, impatience, or drivers trying to squeeze through traffic when it just isn't safe. Understanding what commonly causes these wrecks can help explain why fault is so often disputed after a collision.

Some of the most common causes of left-turn accidents include:

- Misjudging the speed or distance of oncoming vehicles and turning without a truly safe gap
- Failing to yield the right of way as required by [Texas Transportation Code § 545.152](#), especially at busy intersections
- Rushing a turn on a yellow or stale green light, particularly when oncoming drivers are speeding up to beat the red
- Obstructed views from large vehicles, poor intersection design, or visual clutter that hides oncoming traffic
- Distracted driving, such as checking a phone or GPS instead of watching oncoming lanes
- Turning left across multiple lanes of traffic and missing a vehicle changing lanes at the same time

- Bad weather or low visibility that drivers fail to account for by slowing down and taking extra care

Is the left-turning driver automatically at fault?

According to Texas law, a driver turning left must yield the right of way to an oncoming vehicle that's in the intersection or close enough to be a hazard. That's it. But "yield the right of way" doesn't mean you're automatically liable for any collision that happens. It means you have a legal obligation to be careful.

If you violate that obligation and cause a crash, then yes, you're liable. But if the oncoming driver did something that made the crash unavoidable (such as speeding, running a red light, or driving while distracted) then the situation becomes more complicated.

Texas operates under what's called "comparative fault" or "modified comparative negligence." Basically, fault isn't binary. It's not all-or-nothing. However, Texas has something called the "51% bar rule." If you're found to be 51% or more at fault, you can't recover a single dollar in damages. But if you're found to be 50% or less at fault, you can recover the percentage of damages that corresponds to the other driver's fault. So if your damages were \$50,000 and you're found 40% at fault (meaning the other driver is 60% at fault), you can recover \$30,000.

What evidence actually proves who caused the accident?

When a left-turn crash happens, many drivers assume the police report is the final word on fault. It isn't. A report is just one piece of the puzzle, and building a strong case means locking down other evidence quickly, before it disappears.

Key types of evidence that can help you build a strong case:

- **Traffic camera footage:** Intersection video can show timing, speed, light color, and the exact moment of impact, but recordings are usually kept only 7–30 days before they're overwritten.
- **Witness statements:** Independent witnesses can describe speeds, signal colors, and driver behavior; getting their names, contact information, and written statements can significantly strengthen your case.
- **Physical evidence:** Vehicle damage patterns, skid marks, and debris fields help accident reconstruction experts determine impact angles, speeds, and whether you were already well into your turn.
- **Vehicle and phone data:** "Black box" data from newer vehicles can reveal speed, braking, and other actions before the crash, while cell phone records can show if the other driver was distracted.

- **Your own consistent statement:** The version you give to police and your attorney should stay consistent over time; changing details later gives insurance companies an excuse to question your credibility.

How do I protect myself in the immediate aftermath of a left-turn crash?

Your actions in the first hour after a left-turn accident have enormous consequences on the outcome of your case. Here's what you should do:

Contact the police and get a police report

Police will arrive and document what they observe. Cooperate fully with the police and answer their questions factually and accurately. Get the officer's name, badge number, and the report number they generate. That report becomes the first official document in your case.

Gather visual evidence at the scene

Take photos of everything before anything moves: both vehicles' positions, damage patterns, tire skid marks if any, traffic signals, intersection signage, weather conditions, road surface, visibility. Photo documentation from immediately after impact beats memory every time.

Speak to witnesses

If there were witnesses, politely ask for their contact information. Explain that you're gathering facts about the car accident. Most people will share their info if you're respectful and direct.

Be careful what you say

Don't have a long conversation about the accident with the other driver beyond exchanging required information (name, phone, address, insurance). Don't apologize or say things like "I didn't see you" or "I didn't have time to react."

Anything you say can and will be used by their insurance company to challenge your claim. Your statement at the scene is just one piece of evidence, and casual statements often get misinterpreted or quoted wrong.

Also, don't give a recorded statement to the other driver's insurance company without legal representation. Period. They'll frame questions in ways designed to lock you into a narrative that supports their liability position. A simple statement like "I'm recovering and need to speak with my attorney about the details" is sufficient. It's not admitting anything; it's protecting yourself.

Get medical attention as soon as possible

Seek medical attention even if you don't feel injured. Adrenaline masks pain. Some injuries don't show symptoms for hours or days. Getting checked out creates medical documentation that becomes part of your damages claim. Later on, if you want to claim back pain or

headaches, your medical records from the day of the accident strengthen that claim immeasurably.

Get legal help

Don't risk losing the compensation you need by taking on your case alone. Get a skilled Texas car accident lawyer who knows the law and knows how to fight back when insurance companies try to downplay or deny your claim.

Put a dedicated Houston law firm on your side

If you were hurt in a car accident anywhere in Texas, the Houston-based attorneys at [Smith & Hassler](#) can help you level the playing field. We can investigate what happened, deal with the insurance companies, and fight for the full value of your medical bills, lost income, pain and suffering, and future needs. For more than 30 years, injured Texans have turned to us when a crash turned their life upside down, and our team knows how to build cases that demand attention and real results.

Our law firm serves clients in Houston, Channelview, and communities throughout Texas, and we make it easy to find out where you stand. We offer a free consultation, so you can talk directly with an experienced attorney about your crash, your injuries, and your legal options. You don't pay a dime upfront or guess what to do next.

To book a free consultation, you can [contact us online](#), call us, or visit one of our Houston-area offices. A member of our legal team will follow up to discuss how we can help.