

Bicycle Dooring Accidents in Texas

Why Opening A Car Door Without Looking Can Cost A Driver Far More Than They Expect

A door swings open. A cyclist has less than a second to react. What happens next can change everything, from a broken collarbone and cracked helmet to months of surgery, physical therapy, and income loss that piles up while the rider is off the bike and off work. Dooring crashes don't look like much from the outside, but the forces involved are entirely out of proportion to the apparent simplicity of the event.

Texas law is clear about who is responsible when a vehicle door causes a crash. The problem isn't the law. The problem is that drivers rarely see themselves as the cause, and insurance companies are practiced at arguing that the cyclist should have reacted faster, ridden farther from parked vehicles, or noticed the door starting to open. At [Smith & Hassler](#), our [Houston bicycle accident attorneys](#) know how these cases work and how carriers try to complicate them. We've represented injured cyclists across Houston and Texas and we understand the specific legal framework that governs these crashes.

What Texas Law Says About Opening A Door Into Traffic

[Texas Transportation Code § 545.418](#) makes the rule straightforward: a person may not open the door of a motor vehicle on the side available to moving traffic unless the door may be opened in reasonable safety without interfering with the movement of other traffic. The same section prohibits leaving a door open next to moving traffic for longer than is necessary to load or unload a passenger.

The statute doesn't require the cyclist to prove the driver was distracted or careless in some vague sense. It requires showing that the door was opened when it wasn't safe to do so. That's a factual question about timing and positioning, and it's answered by the physical evidence at the scene and by any witnesses who saw what happened.

Texas also gives cyclists the same legal status as vehicle operators on public roads. That means cyclists have a right to use the roadway, and other users have a corresponding duty not to interfere with their movement. A door thrown into the bike lane or into the space a cyclist was lawfully occupying is a violation of that right, and the statutory duty under § 545.418 makes the legal path clearer than in jurisdictions where the standard is more ambiguous.

Who Else May Bear Liability Beyond The Driver?

Liability in a dooring case doesn't always end with the person who opened the door. Several other scenarios can bring additional parties into the legal analysis:

- **The Vehicle's Owner If Different From The Driver:** When the door was opened by someone who borrowed or rented the vehicle, the owner's insurance coverage may come into play depending on policy terms and the relationship between the owner and

the person driving. Texas law generally extends the owner's liability to permissive users of the vehicle, which means the owner's policy is often the first layer of coverage.

- **An Employer If The Driver Was Working:** A driver who opens a door during the course of employment, whether they're a delivery driver, a rideshare driver letting out a passenger, or a company employee, may expose their employer to liability under respondeat superior. This matters practically because employers typically carry higher coverage limits than individuals.
- **A Property Manager Or Business If The Door Zone Was Unsafe:** In some cases, particularly on urban streets where parallel parking is adjacent to bike lanes, a property or business that directs customers to parking areas may have contributed to conditions that predictably produce these crashes. This is a more attenuated theory, but it's worth analyzing in cases involving commercial districts where dooring incidents occur repeatedly.
- **Another Driver If A Downstream Collision Resulted:** If the cyclist, after being struck by the door, was hit by a passing vehicle while down in the roadway, that driver's conduct enters the liability picture. A rear driver who had time to stop and didn't creates their own exposure independent of the dooring driver's.

The [insurance dynamics](#) depend on who is involved and what coverage exists. The dooring driver's liability policy is the starting point, but in serious injury cases where damages exceed policy limits, identifying all responsible parties is what allows full recovery.

The Injuries That Make These Cases Serious

Picture a commuter cyclist moving at about 15 miles per hour along a downtown street. A parked car's passenger door flies open directly into the bike lane. The cyclist hits the door edge-on, is thrown sideways, and lands on the pavement with the bike on top of them. The impact lasts a fraction of a second but the injuries it produces don't resolve in days.

The injury patterns in dooring crashes reflect the mechanics of the event. The rider is thrown abruptly sideways or forward over the door, without warning and with no chance to absorb the impact in a controlled way. What gets hurt depends on the height of the door, the speed of the rider, and how the rider lands.

- **Clavicle And Shoulder Injuries:** The collarbone and shoulder complex absorb a disproportionate share of the impact in lateral falls. Clavicle fractures, AC joint separations, and rotator cuff tears from bracing impacts are common in dooring crashes and frequently require surgical repair. Recovery from shoulder reconstruction can take six months to a year, and some riders experience lasting limitations in strength and range of motion.
- **Head And Face Trauma:** Even with a helmet, a rider thrown into traffic or onto pavement can sustain concussive brain injuries, facial lacerations that require surgical closure, and dental trauma. A rider who comes down face-first has almost no protection from the road surface regardless of helmet quality, and facial injuries often carry both

functional and cosmetic consequences that extend well beyond the initial hospitalization.

- **Wrist And Forearm Fractures:** Riders who instinctively extend their arms to break a fall often fracture the radius or ulna, or sustain carpal injuries from the impact. These fractures can be complex, requiring surgical fixation and extended immobilization, and the recovery period prevents most riders from working if their job involves any manual activity.
- **Road Rash And Soft Tissue Damage:** [Motorcycle road rash injuries](#) and bicycle road rash injuries follow similar patterns when a rider slides across pavement. Deep abrasions through multiple skin layers, wound contamination that requires professional cleaning and dressing, and scarring with permanent cosmetic consequences are common outcomes in dooring falls at typical riding speeds.
- **Knee And Hip Injuries:** Lateral impact and landing on the hip or knee can produce labral tears, patellar fractures, meniscus tears, and hip contusions that don't show their full extent on initial imaging. [Meniscus tears from crashes](#) often require arthroscopic repair and a recovery timeline that can extend to many months of physical therapy.

The cumulative effect of these injuries goes beyond the physical. Time away from work, help needed at home, inability to participate in activities that define the injured person's quality of life — all of these are real losses that enter the damages calculation in a Texas personal injury case.

How Insurance Carriers Respond To Dooring Claims

Texas's modified comparative fault system under [Tex. Civ. Prac. & Rem. Code § 33.001](#) allows carriers to argue that the injured cyclist shares some portion of fault. In dooring cases, the standard arguments are: the cyclist was riding too close to the parking lane, a reasonable rider would have seen the door starting to open, or the cyclist was moving at a speed that made evasion impossible. All three arguments are attempts to push fault above 50%, which under Texas law would bar any recovery.

The carrier's position typically appears early in the claim process, often in the form of a recorded statement request designed to capture anything the cyclist says that can be used to support a [fault argument](#). What the cyclist said at the scene, what they reported to the police, and what they describe in recorded communications all feed into the comparative fault defense.

The physical evidence answers these arguments better than any statement. The mark the door edge left on the bike, the position of the cyclist and the vehicle in the post-crash photos, the width of the parking lane relative to the bike lane, and eyewitness accounts of how suddenly the door opened all contribute to a factual record that is harder to contradict than memory.

[NHTSA bicycle safety data](#) shows that nearly three-quarters of all bicyclist deaths occurred in urban areas — exactly the environment where dooring crashes happen most often. Urban proximity to parked vehicles is an inherent feature of city cycling, not a choice the cyclist makes that reduces the driver's duty to check before opening.

Determining Fault When There Are No Witnesses

Many dooring crashes happen in the moment between when a passenger opens a door and when a driver or nearby pedestrian looks up. The cyclist may be alone with the driver after the crash, and the accounts may diverge immediately. When there are no eyewitnesses, the physical evidence carries the entire weight of the case.

The [role of dashcam and surveillance footage](#) in Houston crash cases has grown substantially as urban surveillance infrastructure has expanded. Businesses with exterior cameras, traffic cameras at nearby intersections, and other vehicles with dashcams may have captured the crash or the seconds leading up to it. That footage typically has a short retention window before it's overwritten, which means the request needs to go out quickly.

The police report, if one was generated, records the officer's observations at the scene, the positions of the vehicles and the bike, and any statements made by the parties. Even if no citation was issued, those observations are part of the factual record.

What Municipal Notice Evidence Looks Like In A Road Defect Case

The most important step after a dooring crash is preserving evidence before it disappears. This means photographing the door, the bike, the road surface, and the rider's injuries immediately. It means getting the names of anyone who was nearby. It means not moving the bike until the scene is documented. And it means consulting with a [personal injury attorney in Houston](#) before giving a recorded statement to the at-fault driver's insurance carrier.

Smith & Hassler takes bicycle injury cases on contingency, which means our fee comes from the compensation we recover for you and not from your own pocket. If you were hit by a car door while riding your bicycle in Houston or anywhere in Texas, [contact us](#) to talk through what happened and what your claim might look like.