

Who's at Fault When a Driver Makes an Unsafe U-Turn and Causes a Texas Car Accident?

Houston Car Accident Lawyers Explain How Texas Assigns Fault in U-Turn Crashes

A U-turn looks simple until traffic closes the gap you thought you had. You start angling across two or three lanes to head back the way you came. Or another driver does the same thing without leaving enough room. Suddenly, a U-turn can become a serious Houston [car accident](#). When that happens, who's at fault? The answer isn't always as straightforward as it first looks.

At [Smith & Hassler](#), our Houston car accident attorneys have handled U-turn collisions throughout Houston and across Texas. We know these cases can turn on details that aren't obvious at the scene, including sight distance, signal use, traffic-control devices, and the other driver's speed. Before accepting an insurer's version of what happened, make sure you understand your rights and options.

What Makes A U-Turn Illegal Or Unsafe In Texas?

[Texas transportation Code § 545.103](#) sets the baseline rule for changing course: a driver can't make the movement unless it can be done safely. That rule applies to a U-turn. If a driver begins turning across traffic when there isn't enough time or distance to complete the maneuver safely, that conduct can support a finding of negligence.

A second rule adds another layer. [Texas Transportation Code § 545.102](#) prohibits turning to travel in the opposite direction when approaching a curve or the crest of a grade if the vehicle isn't visible to another vehicle approaching from either direction within 500 feet. The rule matters most where hills or curves limit sight distance.

Signal use matters too. [Texas Transportation Code § 545.104](#) requires a driver to signal continuously for at least the last 100 feet before a right or left turn. A U-turn ordinarily begins as a left-turn movement, so failing to signal can remove a warning that might otherwise have helped an approaching driver react.

Who Is Usually At Fault When A U-Turn Causes A Crash?

The turning driver often faces the first scrutiny because Texas law requires the movement to be made safely. But there isn't an automatic rule that the driver making the U-turn is always responsible. At a controlled [intersection](#), right of way can depend on the signal, signs, lane markings, and what each driver was doing immediately before impact.

The police report can be an important starting point, but it doesn't decide civil fault. A Texas CR-3 may record the officer's observations, diagram, narrative, and contributing factors. Courts can treat an officer's causation opinion differently depending on the foundation for that opinion, so a "made U-turn" entry shouldn't be treated as the final word on liability.

Fault depends on what each driver actually did in the moments before the crash. It isn't decided just by who was turning. That's why speed, distance, signal use, traffic-control devices, and reaction time matter so much in these cases.

Can The Other Driver Share Blame For A U-Turn Crash?

Yes. A driver going straight can still share responsibility if their own conduct helped cause the collision. Speeding, running a red light, or [driving while distracted](#) can change the amount of time and distance available to avoid a U-turning vehicle. Texas proportionate-responsibility rules allow fault to be divided when more than one person's conduct contributes to the crash.

Speed can be especially important. A driver making a U-turn judges the available gap based partly on how quickly oncoming traffic is approaching. If the other vehicle is traveling substantially faster than expected, the turning driver may have much less time than the scene initially appears to provide. That doesn't automatically excuse an unsafe U-turn, but it can affect how responsibility is apportioned.

Distraction can matter for the same reason. A driver looking at a phone may miss a turn signal, fail to notice a vehicle already committed to the maneuver, or react later than an attentive driver would. When both drivers make mistakes, Texas law doesn't require the entire loss to be placed on only one of them.

What Role Does Visibility Play In A U-Turn Accident Claim?

Visibility often helps determine whether a U-turn could be made safely. Texas Transportation Code § 545.102 creates a specific 500-foot visibility rule near curves and crests of grades. Sightlines matter on other roads too. Parked trucks, construction barriers, vegetation, roadway geometry, rain, glare, and darkness can all reduce what a driver can see.

A driver who can't see far enough down the road may not have a reliable way to judge whether the turn is safe. Even when § 545.102's specific curve-or-hill rule doesn't apply, an unsafe movement can still fall under § 545.103.

Posted traffic-control devices matter as well. [Texas Transportation Code § 544.004](#) generally requires drivers to obey applicable official traffic-control devices. A posted No U-Turn sign can therefore make the movement unlawful even if the driver believes there is enough visibility to complete it.

What Evidence Proves Who Caused A U-Turn Crash?

U-turn crashes often come down to evidence showing exactly how the maneuver developed. Some of that evidence can disappear quickly, so it's important to preserve what's available before video is overwritten, vehicles are repaired, or memories fade. Useful evidence can include:

- **Dashcam and traffic camera footage** - Video can show vehicle positions, signal use, traffic-light phases, and how much warning either driver appeared to have.
- **The Texas crash report** - A [Texas accident report](#) can document the officer's observations, diagram, statements, and listed contributing factors, but it doesn't conclusively establish civil fault.
- **Physical evidence and vehicle damage** - Impact points, tire marks, debris, and final vehicle positions can help a qualified reconstruction expert analyze movement and collision geometry. Damage alone doesn't reliably prove an exact pre-impact speed.
- **Witness statements** - Independent witnesses may remember signal use, traffic-light status, speed, lane position, and how much space the turning driver had.
- **Signal and traffic-control evidence** - Signal timing plans, maintenance records, signs, and lane markings can help establish what traffic controls applied at the location and whether they were functioning as intended.
- **Electronic records** - Cellphone records, vehicle data, or other electronic evidence may become important when speed or distraction is disputed, although access often requires the proper legal process.

No single piece of evidence tells the whole story. The strongest reconstruction usually comes from comparing the physical scene, video, witness accounts, electronic data, and the drivers' statements instead of relying on one source in isolation.

How Does Roadway Design Impact Fault In A U-Turn Crash?

Houston's feeder roads and divided highways create plenty of U-turn opportunities. Many major corridors have designated U-turn or turnaround lanes that change how traffic is expected to move through an intersection. Those features can matter when investigators reconstruct where each driver was supposed to be and what traffic controls applied.

Using a designated U-turn lane doesn't make a turn automatically safe, and making a U-turn somewhere else doesn't automatically make it negligent. The important questions are whether signs or markings prohibited the movement, whether the driver used the proper lane, whether the sight distance was adequate, and whether the turn could be completed safely under the conditions.

Median openings, lane arrows, channelized turn lanes, and traffic-control devices can all change the analysis. A legal U-turn through an opening designed for that movement can present a very different fact pattern from a driver who crosses into opposing traffic where the roadway design or posted controls don't permit it.

What Details Do Insurance Companies Focus On After A U-Turn Crash?

Once a claim is filed, adjusters look for details that can support or challenge each driver's version of events. Knowing what matters early can help prevent important evidence from being lost.

- **Exact turning point** - The location of the maneuver can show whether the driver used a designated lane, a median opening, or another part of the roadway.
- **Speed and reaction evidence** - Video, vehicle data, tire marks, and reconstruction analysis may help show whether either driver had a realistic opportunity to avoid the collision.
- **Statements about what happened** - Recorded, written, or documented statements can become part of the claim file and may be compared against later testimony and physical evidence.
- **Cellphone and electronic data** - When distraction is genuinely at issue, phone records or vehicle data may help confirm or refute what a driver says they were doing before impact.
- **Weather, lighting, and visibility** - Adjusters may compare crash-time conditions with photographs, video, roadway geometry, and the visibility available to each driver.
- **Vehicle positioning and impact evidence** - Where the vehicles collided and came to rest can support or contradict parts of a driver's account, especially when interpreted with the rest of the scene evidence.

Insurance companies can build competing fault arguments from the same evidence. That's why context matters. A single photo, report code, or statement shouldn't be allowed to substitute for the full sequence of how the U-turn and collision actually happened.

Does Texas's Comparative Negligence Law Affect A U-Turn Claim?

Yes. Texas uses proportionate responsibility. Under [Texas Civil Practice and Remedies Code § 33.001](#), a claimant can't recover damages if their percentage of responsibility is greater than 50 percent.

The rule matters even when the U-turn itself was unsafe. If the other driver was speeding, distracted, or ran a red light, a jury may assign that driver part of the responsibility. The claimant's recoverable damages are then reduced by the percentage of responsibility assigned to the claimant, so the exact allocation can materially affect the result.

That makes the factual record especially important in a disputed U-turn case. The difference between being found 50 percent responsible and 51 percent responsible can determine whether an injured claimant recovers reduced damages or nothing at all.

How Can A Houston Car Accident Lawyer Help After A U-Turn Crash?

U-turn crashes can look simple at first, but fault can get complicated quickly. Reconstructing sight distance, traffic-control devices, vehicle speed, signal use, and the timing of each driver's movement may require more than the crash report alone.

Our legal team at Smith & Hassler can obtain available video, review the Texas crash report, interview witnesses, preserve electronic evidence, and work with accident-reconstruction experts when the facts require it. We build the case around what the evidence actually shows rather than accepting the insurance company's first fault assessment.

You don't have to accept an insurance company's first explanation for how a U-turn crash happened. [Contact us](#) to discuss your legal options. We can answer your questions, review the available evidence, and explain what steps may make sense next.