

California Laws Governing Hit-and-Run Drivers

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Few motor vehicle accidents sicken the public more than those involving hit-and-run drivers. It's often difficult to understand how any driver can leave injured people unattended at an accident scene. Likewise, it's very irresponsible to damage an empty vehicle and then fail to leave your contact information so that its owner can later locate you. Yet these events happen every day. Fortunately, California laws provide specific penalties for those who commit either of these unlawful acts. While our errors can sometimes prove costly, we all need to be able to depend on each other to do the right thing.

California Motor Vehicle Code Section 20002: Hit-and-Run Property Crimes/Penalties

This section of the California Motor Vehicle Code states that once you hit another vehicle, even if no one appears to have been injured, you have a duty to stop and provide the other driver with your name and address. If asked to do so, you must also allow the other driver to see your driver's license and a copy of your vehicle registration.

Should you ever be driving a vehicle and get into an accident when you're not the registered owner of it, you must provide the name and address of the registered owner to the driver of the other vehicle (along with your own contact information). *If you hit an unattended, parked vehicle*, you still have a duty to stop and leave *all* of your basic contact information, including your driver's license number, so that the vehicle's owner can later contact you. There's actually a duty to leave this information *in written form*, in a conspicuous place such as under a windshield wiper.

Charges can be filed against anyone who fails to fully comply with the requirements set forth in Motor Vehicle Code Section 20002. You can be convicted of a misdemeanor, forced to serve up to six months in jail and even have to pay a fine that doesn't exceed \$1,000.

California's **Felony Hit-and-Run** Offense: Possible Charges and Penalties

If you hit another car and one of its occupants suffers bodily injuries — and you fail to stop and render aid and provide your full contact information — the provisions of Motor Vehicle Code **Section 20001** will come into play. Entitled, “Duty to Stop at Scene of Accident,” Section 20001 sets forth all of the possible penalties that can be imposed on someone who fails to stop after hitting another vehicle and injuring one or more of its occupants.

A driver who fails to stop under these circumstances can be imprisoned in a county jail or state prison for not more than one year **and** assessed a fine between at least \$1,000 dollars and up to \$10,000. If the driver who commits a felony hit-and-run accident causes “serious, permanent injury” or death to one of the occupants of the other vehicle, he or she can even be imprisoned for as long as **four years in prison** and heavily fined.

Hopefully, none of our readers will ever wind up becoming a victim of a **hit-and-run driver**. However, if that has recently occurred in your life, you should seriously consider meeting with one of our attorneys so that we can advise you about the best ways to protect all of your rights and obtain just compensation for your injuries.

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