How Crash Reports and Dashcam Video Shape an Auto Accident Claim

The evidence in a car crash claim starts to scatter within hours. Cars are towed and repaired, video is overwritten and witnesses become hard to reach. A car accident attorney typically starts with the car crash lawyer claims police report and any photos or video, then the data stored in the vehicles. Here is how each source fits into a claim.

The police report

When officers respond to a crash, they usually prepare a crash report, often called a police report. It usually records who was driving each vehicle and which insurer covers it, along with a diagram, a short narrative and any citations issued. In many states, drivers must also report crashes involving injury, death or property damage above a set dollar amount. Copies are usually available from the agency that responded, such as a city police department, a sheriff's office or the state highway patrol, sometimes for a fee.

A crash report is influential in insurance claims, but it does not decide fault. Rules on using an officer's opinions at trial vary by state. 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.

Dashcam video and photographs

Dashcam footage can capture the seconds before a crash better than a witness can. 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, though many systems record over footage within days or weeks. Photos taken at the scene show vehicle positions, debris, skid marks and road signs, and photos of injuries taken over several weeks can show how they changed.

What the vehicle itself recorded

Many passenger vehicles have an event data recorder (EDR). NHTSA describes an EDR as a device that records technical vehicle and occupant information for a brief period, **car accident lawyer** measured in seconds, not minutes, around the time of a crash. Depending on the vehicle, the data may include speed and brake application as well as 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 access by others is limited to situations such as owner consent or a court order.

EDR data can be lost when a car is repaired or sold for salvage. Insurers often move a total loss vehicle to a salvage auction quickly, 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

Witnesses with no stake in the claim often carry weight. Collect their names and phone numbers at the scene when it is safe. Medical records link the injuries to the crash, and insurers often point to gaps in treatment 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 no result can be predicted from it.