How Crash Reports and Dashcam Video Shape an Auto Accident Claim

Evidence from a car crash starts to disappear within hours. Cars are towed and repaired, video gets recorded over and witnesses become hard to reach. A car accident attorney typically starts with the police report, photos, video and 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, and it often includes a diagram, a short narrative and any citations. 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.

Insurers rely heavily on the crash report, but it is not the final word on 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, *car accident lawyer* the agency may accept a request for a correction or a supplement. An auto accident attorney will check the report against the photos and statements.

Photos and dashcam footage

Dashcam footage can capture the seconds before a crash more clearly than any witness. Keep the original file with its timestamp, instead of a phone recording of the screen, and make 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.

The car's own black box

Many cars and light trucks carry an event data recorder (EDR). NHTSA describes an EDR as a device that records technical vehicle and occupant information for a brief period, seconds rather than minutes, surrounding 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 if the car is repaired or crushed. 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 can be downloaded.

Witness statements and medical records

Witnesses with no stake car accident attorney in the claim often carry weight. Their names and phone numbers should be collected at the scene if it is safe to do so. Medical records connect 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. Pain levels, missed work and

appointments are worth noting in a journal while the details are fresh. This article is general information, not legal advice, and it does not predict the result of any claim.