Don't go too far... you may do more harm than good.

Police, fire and ambulance should be called promptly. Ask several passing motorists, going in opposite directions, and bystanders to call for help. Asking several people is important in case a cellphone is not handy. The more people you ask to call for help, the more likely the call will be made.

It is better to have an accident reported by two or three people than not at all because somebody didn't find a phone. A CB radio can also be used to summon help.

Eighty percent of those hurt in traffic accidents suffer head injuries. If a person has a head injury, assume he or she also has neck and back injuries.

Bandaging wounds, attempting to splint broken bones, or using more advanced first-aid techniques, especially if professional help is on the way, generally is not recommended. If an injury is obviously life threatening and waiting for help would endanger a life, necessary action probably should be taken.

At any accident scene, you may feel helpless or unable to give assistance or comfort. However, there several "safe" things you can do:

- Cover the victim with a coat or blanket to keep them warm and prevent shock.
- Shade the victim from the sun or protect them from falling rain. Make the setting safe and comfortable while waiting for the ambulance.
- Talk to the victim and reassure him or her help is on the way. Be encouraging.
- Hold the victim's hand while waiting for the ambulance. While this might not seem like much, it can do a lot for an injured person's sense of survival.
- Use a clean cloth as a compress to stop the flow of blood from a serious wound. In the case of head wounds, experts suggest using as light a pressure as possible because the victim could have a fractured skull.

Tips compiled from numerous emergency roadside service providers, the American Red Cross and AAA.

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Tips for Safely Providing EMERGENCY ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE

Please read and keep a copy in your glove box.

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U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

Whether it's a flat tire, breakdown or an accident, there is a good chance you'll experience some sort of roadside emergency in your lifetime. If it happens on a busy street or freeway where you have to contend with heavy traffic, a bad situation can quickly become worse.

If you encounter an emergency requiring assistance while driving, your personal roadside safety should be your first priority. Follow these simple safety recommendations to help prevent one accident from becoming two or you ending up as a fatality. Practicing smart roadside safety techniques can help prevent you from becoming an unfortunate statistic.

First Things First

- Park your car safely out of traffic.
- Turn on your emergency flashers.
- Warn oncoming traffic there is an accident ahead using bystanders, road flares or warning triangles.
- Have several people call 9-1-1, the police or fire department to notify them there has been an accident.
- Turn off ignition switches on vehicles involved in the accident to reduce the risk of fire.
- If the accident victim is conscious, ask if assistance is needed.
- If the victim rejects an offer of help for any reason, do not provide aid. (If you give aid when a person says they don't want it, you might be vulnerable under Good Samaritan laws.)
- Even if an accident victim says "Yes, help me," you should still be cautious. (If there is no immediate danger, there is no need to move the victim.)

Good Samaritan Laws

Most states have "Good Samaritan" laws to protect those who give aid at an accident from legal action, but not everyone is covered. Some states apply thier laws only to citizens rendering assistance to auto accident victims, and still other states give protection only to certified emergency personnel. Check applicable state laws for more information.

If a car crashes into a utility pole and the driver is not making any effort to get out, you might think the best thing to do is drag him or her from the wreck. Yet that is usually not the best thing to do. Unless there is some other danger, such as fire, victims should not be moved by bystanders.

For example, if a car skids on a turn, crashes into the guard rail, and then flips on its side, what should you do first? There are probably several "good" courses of action.

Safety experts, however, generally recommend you park your car safely out of traffic and turn on your emergency flashers. Then warn oncoming vehicles there is an accident ahead by sending other bystanders to flag down traffic approaching the accident scene. Of course, "flagmen" need to stay out of traffic lanes. Setting out road flares several hundred feet on either side of the accident is also a good first step, provided there is no danger of fire from leaking fuel.

An accident victim lying in the road is especially vulnerable. Nevertheless, it is usually best not to move him or her. Such victims can be protected from traffic by positioning vehicles on both sides, creating protective "barriers." Barrier vehicles should have their four-way flashers turned on.