

Hit-and-Run Accidents: What Alabama Victims Need to Know

Don't Hesitate. The Clock Is Already Running.

A hit-and-run leaves victims with a different kind of problem than most car accidents. There's no dispute about who ran the red light or drifted into the wrong lane. The dispute is whether anyone will ever be able to name the driver who did it. That uncertainty can make a victim feel like the case is over before it starts, but Alabama law provides real paths to compensation even when the driver is never identified.

An [Alabama hit-and-run accident lawyer's](#) first job in these cases often isn't proving fault, since fault is rarely in question. It's a race to identify the vehicle and driver before the evidence that could do that disappears for good.

Why the First 72 Hours Can Be Critical

Hit-and-run cases run on a different clock than other crashes. Businesses may overwrite security camera footage within days, sometimes within 24 to 72 hours, unless someone specifically requests that it be preserved. Once that footage is gone, it's gone permanently.

License plate reader systems, used by many police departments and toll authorities, store data on a rolling cycle as well. Retention periods for license plate reader data can vary, making it important to determine quickly whether relevant records exist and can be preserved.

Witnesses present similar problems. A bystander who glimpsed a partial plate number or a distinctive dent in the fleeing car's bumper will remember those details clearly the same day, but that memory can fade quickly, and details that could have identified the vehicle may be lost over time.

This is why the earliest hours after a hit-and-run carry so much weight. A victim who waits even a few days to start pursuing footage or canvassing for witnesses may be working with far less than someone who acted immediately.

How Investigators Track Down a Fleeing Driver

Identifying a hit-and-run driver isn't left entirely to chance. Police departments issue BOLO, or "be on the lookout," alerts describing the vehicle to patrol officers across the area, increasing the odds that a matching car gets spotted before the damage is repaired. Departments equipped with license plate reader networks can also run partial plate numbers against passing traffic in the days following a crash.

Body shops sometimes play an unexpected role as well. Alabama law includes reporting requirements for garages that encounter certain vehicles showing evidence of involvement in an

accident. Investigators may also contact local repair shops while searching for a damaged vehicle. Even a small amount of information can be the difference between identifying a fleeing driver and never learning who caused the crash:

- **Partial License Plate Numbers:** Even a few characters, or a description of the plate's state or color, can help narrow down the vehicle involved.
- **Paint Transfer and Vehicle Debris:** Broken parts, glass fragments, or paint left behind on the victim's vehicle may help identify the make, model, and color of the fleeing car.
- **License Plate Reader and Toll Data:** Cameras at intersections, toll booths, and some private businesses may have captured the vehicle passing through the area around the time of the crash.
- **Repair Shop and Body Shop Records:** A vehicle brought in for repairs matching the type of damage from the crash can sometimes be traced back through shop records.

This same evidence matters even if the driver is never identified, since it also supports a strong insurance claim by documenting exactly how the crash happened and what kind of vehicle caused it.

Alabama's Criminal Penalties for Leaving the Scene

Alabama treats leaving the scene of an accident as a criminal offense, with the severity of the offense depending in part on whether the crash involved only property damage or resulted in injury or death. A conviction can also have driver's-license consequences.

The criminal case proceeds separately from a victim's civil claim for compensation. A victim may still pursue compensation for medical bills, lost income, and other losses regardless of whether criminal charges are filed.

When the Driver Is Never Found: Uninsured Motorist Coverage

When a hit-and-run driver is never identified, uninsured motorist coverage under the victim's own auto insurance policy may provide an important source of compensation. This coverage exists specifically for situations where the at-fault driver can't be found or doesn't carry adequate insurance.

Some Alabama auto insurance policies require corroborating evidence in a no-contact hit-and-run claim. In those cases, the insured's account alone may not satisfy the policy's requirements, making an independent witness or other evidence especially valuable.

Stacking Coverage and Other Sources of Compensation

A hit-and-run claim often draws on more than one source of coverage, and identifying every available policy can significantly affect what a victim ultimately recovers.

- **Your Own UM/UIM Policy:** An important potential source of compensation when the at-fault driver can't be identified or is uninsured.
- **Stacking Multiple Household Policies:** In some cases, coverage may be combined across multiple vehicles insured under the same household, increasing the total available compensation.
- **Medical Payments Coverage:** A separate portion of an auto policy that can cover medical bills regardless of fault, often paying out faster than a larger UM claim.
- **Health Insurance as a Bridge:** Personal health insurance can cover immediate treatment while a larger claim is still being investigated and negotiated.

Identifying every one of these sources matters more in a hit-and-run case than in a claim against a known driver, since there's no single at-fault party's insurance company to fall back on if one avenue comes up short.

What Happens If the Driver Is Identified Later?

Sometimes a hit-and-run driver is identified weeks or even months after the crash, whether through an arrest, a tip, or evidence that surfaces later. When that happens, the claim can shift from a UM claim against a victim's own insurer to a direct claim against the driver and their insurance policy.

Restitution ordered as part of a criminal case doesn't take the place of this civil claim. Criminal restitution is typically limited and tied to the criminal court's judgment, while a civil claim can pursue compensation for medical expenses, lost income, and pain and suffering the crash actually caused. Keeping both options open, and revisiting a claim if new information about the driver surfaces, can meaningfully change the outcome.

Put Your Trust in an Alabama Hit-and-Run Accident Attorney

A hit-and-run leaves victims facing a harder question than who caused the crash. It leaves them facing the question of whether anyone will ever be held accountable at all.

Put your trust in [Dean Waite & Associates, LLC](#) to move quickly on the evidence that disappears fastest, pursue every source of compensation available, and stay on the case even if the driver is identified months down the road.

[Contact us](#) for a free case evaluation. We want to help you get your life back on track.