

Why Wrong-Way Drivers Cause Catastrophic Crashes on Maine Highways

Maine Car Accident Lawyers Explain Wrong-Way Crash Liability

A driver merges onto an interstate ramp late at night in Maine and starts driving the wrong direction. Within seconds, that driver is speeding toward oncoming traffic instead of moving with it. [Wrong-way crashes](#) on Maine highways often happen exactly this fast. There's almost no time for the other driver to react or avoid a head-on collision.

The [National Transportation Safety Board \(NTSB\)](#) has studied wrong-way crashes extensively. It found that alcohol impairment plays a role in a large share of these collisions. Older drivers who become confused about which direction to travel also show up disproportionately in wrong-way crash data. NTSB research shows these crashes remain rare compared to other types of collisions but are far more likely to end in death or catastrophic injury.

Our Maine car accident lawyers at [Romanow Law Group](#) have represented families dealing with the aftermath of these devastating collisions. Below, we explain why wrong-way crashes happen and why the injuries tend to be so severe. We also explain how Maine law determines who has to pay for the harm caused.

What Causes Wrong-Way Driving Crashes on Maine Highways?

Wrong-way crashes rarely happen at random. A specific breakdown in judgment, attention, or physical condition usually explains why a driver ended up heading into oncoming traffic. Common causes include:

- **Alcohol or drug impairment** - Impaired drivers struggle to judge direction and read highway signs. Some never even notice they have entered an exit ramp instead of an entrance ramp.
- **Confusion at interchanges** - Complex ramps, poorly lit signage, or unfamiliar roads can lead any driver the wrong way. Older drivers face this risk especially often.
- **Distraction behind the wheel** - A driver checking a phone or adjusting a GPS unit can miss clear wrong-way signage entirely.
- **Driving without headlights at night** - A driver who fails to use headlights becomes far harder for oncoming traffic to spot in time.
- **Fatigue** - An exhausted driver can drift out of a proper lane or misjudge an exit ramp. This sometimes happens without the driver ever fully waking up to the mistake.

Identifying the specific cause behind a wrong-way crash can shape the entire legal claim that follows. An impaired driver faces a different set of legal consequences than a driver

confused by poor road signage. Pinpointing that cause early helps build a stronger case for the people who were hurt.

Why Do Wrong-Way Crashes Cause Such Severe Injuries?

The most devastating wrong-way crashes often involve head-on collisions. The opposing forces involved in a high-speed head-on collision can cause catastrophic damage.

Research from the [AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety](#) has found that wrong-way crashes kill a large share of the drivers going the wrong way. A significant number of people riding in the vehicles they strike head-on also lose their lives. Airbags and seatbelts help, but they were never designed to fully absorb this kind of force.

These crash dynamics often produce catastrophic injuries for anyone involved. Traumatic brain injuries, spinal cord damage, and severe internal injuries are all common outcomes. The severity of these injuries also tends to drive up the value of a legitimate injury claim, since medical costs and long-term care needs are frequently substantial.

Who Is Liable for a Wrong-Way Crash in Maine?

Liable is a legal term used to describe who is legally responsible for paying for the harm caused by an accident. In a wrong-way crash, the driver traveling in the wrong direction is almost always the liable party. Entering oncoming traffic is rarely something the other driver could have prevented.

Liability does not automatically transfer just because a driver was found going the wrong way. An insurance company may still investigate the crash. They will look for any way to argue that the other driver contributed to what happened, even in cases that seem clear-cut on the surface.

Maine allows injured people to recover compensation (money awarded to cover losses caused by someone else's negligence) even in complicated fault scenarios. Understanding exactly how liability gets decided matters for every wrong-way crash victim in the state, especially when an insurance company starts asking pointed questions.

Who Decides Liability After a Wrong-Way Crash in Maine?

An insurance adjuster typically makes the first determination about fault. This is often based on the police report and any available witness statements. That adjuster works for an insurance company, and their early conclusions can shape the size of a settlement offer long before an injured person understands the full extent of their injuries.

A claim that cannot be resolved through negotiation may move into a lawsuit instead. If the case ultimately goes to trial, a judge or jury reviews the evidence presented, including crash reconstruction and medical testimony. They decide how much responsibility each party bears for the collision, and that decision becomes final once the case concludes.

Wrong-way crash cases sometimes involve criminal charges against the at-fault driver, particularly when impairment was involved. A criminal case and a civil injury claim proceed separately, on their own timelines and in different courts. A conviction in one does not automatically decide the outcome of the other.

Can I Recover Compensation if I Was Partly at Fault for the Crash?

Yes, in most situations. Maine follows a modified comparative negligence rule under [14 M.R.S. Section 156](#). This rule allows an injured person to recover compensation even if they share some responsibility for a crash, as long as their fault is not equal to or greater than the fault of the other driver involved.

A jury may find an injured person and the wrong-way driver equally at fault. In that situation, Maine law bars the injured person from recovering anything at all, no matter how serious the injuries were. Any lesser share of fault simply reduces the compensation awarded, rather than eliminating it completely.

Wrong-way crash victims rarely bear any real fault for the collision itself. There is usually little a driver going the correct direction can do to avoid a vehicle suddenly appearing in their lane. Still, insurance companies sometimes look for any argument that might reduce what they owe.

Does Driving Impaired Change Who's Liable for a Wrong-Way Crash?

Impairment does not change who caused the crash, but it can significantly impact the value of a claim. Maine law allows injured people to pursue punitive damages (additional compensation meant to punish especially reckless conduct) in cases involving extreme indifference to the safety of others. Depending on the circumstances, driving drunk or high the wrong way down a highway could support a claim for punitive damages.

Impaired driving can also open the door to claims against parties beyond the driver. A bar, restaurant, or other establishment that served alcohol to a visibly intoxicated person may bear some legal responsibility if that person later caused a wrong-way crash on the drive home.

Proving impairment often requires more than a police report noting the driver had been drinking. Toxicology results and witness accounts from earlier in the night can help.

Receipts or surveillance footage from wherever the driver had been can also strengthen a claim tied to impairment.

Who Else Can Be Held Liable Besides the Wrong-Way Driver?

The wrong-way driver is not always the only party who can be held responsible for a serious crash. Other parties may share liability depending on the circumstances.

- **A bar or restaurant** - An establishment that served alcohol to a visibly intoxicated patron can face liability under [Maine's liquor liability laws](#) if that patron later caused a crash.
- **An employer** - A driver operating a vehicle for work purposes at the time of the crash may make their employer responsible for the resulting damages.
- **A government agency** - Missing wrong-way signage, confusing ramp design, or poor lighting at an interchange may create a potential claim against the government agency responsible for the roadway.
- **A vehicle owner** - If someone other than the driver owned the vehicle, that owner's insurance policy may provide an additional source of compensation in certain circumstances.

Identifying every party who contributed to a wrong-way crash may significantly increase the compensation available to injured victims and grieving families. A thorough investigation early in the process helps make sure no responsible party gets overlooked, along with any available insurance policy that could help.

What Evidence Helps Prove Fault in a Wrong-Way Crash?

Wrong-way crashes often happen fast and leave little time for anyone to fully process what occurred. This makes gathering evidence quickly especially important, before memories fade and physical evidence disappears. A thorough police investigation, including the officer's own observations at the scene, forms the foundation of most claims.

Traffic camera footage, tollbooth records, and nearby business surveillance footage can sometimes capture a wrong-way driver's path before impact. This footage can show exactly where and how they entered the roadway going the wrong direction. Toxicology reports and field sobriety test results also carry significant weight when impairment played a role.

Accident reconstruction experts can analyze skid marks, vehicle damage, and the final resting position of both vehicles. This analysis can confirm exactly how the collision happened. This kind of evidence often becomes critical when an insurance company tries to dispute how the crash actually occurred.

How Can a Maine Car Accident Lawyer Help After a Wrong-Way Crash?

Wrong-way crash cases in Maine often involve catastrophic injuries and significant medical expenses. Some cases also involve a criminal case running alongside the civil claim. These cases can move quickly, and important evidence can disappear within days if no one acts to preserve it.

Our Maine car accident lawyers at [Romanow Law Group](#) investigate these crashes thoroughly. We work to identify every party who may share responsibility and gather the evidence needed to support a full claim. We handle communication with insurance companies so injured people and their families can focus on their recovery.

[Contact us](#) for a free consultation to discuss what happened and learn about your legal options. We can review the details of your case and explain what steps make sense for your specific situation, without any pressure to decide right away or commit to anything on the first call.