



TORII LEGAL ASSISTANCE

OFFICE OF THE STAFF JUDGE ADVOCATE



TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS ON OKINAWA

Traffic accidents are by far the most common international incident for the Army community in Japan. Each traffic accident has the potential to result in prosecution by the Japanese legal authorities because under Japanese law every licensed motor vehicle operator is a professional driver and must exercise a high degree of care. Accidents causing personal injury to individuals can result in confinement or a large fine.

Many things can be done to help avoid prosecution. Of course, the most important consideration is to drive safely and obey all traffic rules. Exercise patience when driving in congested areas, be attentive, and always ensure that you allow enough space for sudden stops. If an accident does happen, drivers are required to render assistance to any victims of the accident, report the accident to Japanese and military law enforcement officials and to stay at the accident scene until advised otherwise by law enforcement authorities. Fleeing the scene of an accident or failing to report an accident will likely result in the driver's prosecution even if only property damage is involved.

Make sure you are carrying, at a minimum, the required liability insurance coverage and make sure that you promptly report any and all accidents to your insurance carrier. Delay or failure to report to the insurance carrier will result in the victim not being promptly compensated [In deciding whether to prosecute, Japanese authorities give great weight to whether the victim has been compensated]. When reports of accidents are made to an insurer, remember to get a copy of the accident report, so you will have evidence that it was reported.

In some cases, particularly where personal injury is involved, a condolence visit to the victim within one or two days of the accident should be made to express regret for the accident and express hope for a speedy recovery. Such visit should be coordinated through the Torii Station Community Relations Office or SJA International Law Division.

*You may call our **International Law Division** at 644-4782 for additional assistance.*