

- VEST FIRST RESPONDER -

HELP FOR HEROES

ALABAMA

Self-Defense Law Reference Guide

Stand Your Ground | Castle Doctrine | Self-Defense | First Responder Protections | Neck Restraint Framework

CERTIFIED TRAINER SUPPLEMENTAL DOCUMENT

Intended exclusively for VEST Certified Trainers. Not a substitute for legal counsel.

ALABAMA IS A STRONG STAND YOUR GROUND STATE

Ala. Code S. 13A-3-23 removes the duty to retreat in ANY place where a person has a legal right to be. The Castle Doctrine extends to home, occupied vehicles, and place of business with a presumption of reasonable fear. Alabama also provides pre-trial criminal immunity and civil immunity for justified force.

PART I: THE ALABAMA SELF-DEFENSE STATUTORY FRAMEWORK

Alabama's self-defense laws are codified in Title 13A, Chapter 3 of the Alabama Criminal Code. The primary statute - Ala. Code S. 13A-3-23 - is among the most comprehensive Stand Your Ground provisions in the country, combining the force standard, deadly force threshold, Castle Doctrine presumption, civil immunity, and criminal immunity in a single section.

STATUTE	SUBJECT MATTER
Ala. Code S. 13A-3-23(a)	Justification for Use of Physical Force - Core Standard
Ala. Code S. 13A-3-23(b)	Stand Your Ground - No Duty to Retreat in Any Lawful Location
Ala. Code S. 13A-3-23(a)(3)	Castle Doctrine - Home, Vehicle, Place of Business Presumption
Ala. Code S. 13A-3-23(d)	Civil and Criminal Immunity for Justified Force
Ala. Code S. 13A-3-27	Pre-Trial Immunity Hearing
Ala. Code S. 13A-5-49(14)	Capital Aggravating Circumstance - Death of First Responder
Ala. Code S. 13A-6-21(a)(4)	Assault 2nd Degree - Intent to Prevent EMS/Fire Performing Duties

Ala. Code S. 13A-3-23(a) - Use of Physical Force in Defense of Person

A person is justified in using physical force when they reasonably believe it necessary to defend themselves or a third person from what they reasonably believe is the use or imminent use of unlawful physical force. Deadly force is justified when necessary to prevent death, serious physical injury, or commission of a forcible felony (robbery, burglary, kidnapping, rape, sodomy, serious assault).

"A person is justified in using physical force upon another person in order to defend himself or herself or a third person from what he or she reasonably believes to be the use or imminent use of unlawful physical force by that other person, and he or she may use a degree of force which he or she reasonably believes to be necessary for that purpose." - Ala. Code S. 13A-3-23(a)

KEY LEGAL ELEMENTS:

- Reasonable Belief - evaluated objectively from the actor's perspective at the moment of the incident.
- Imminent Use of Unlawful Force - threat must be immediate. Past threats or anticipated future harm are insufficient.
- Third-Person Defense - same standard applies when defending another person.
- Proportionality - force must match the threat; deadly force requires the higher threshold.

FOR FIRST RESPONDERS:

Ala. Code S. 13A-3-23 applies to EMS and fire personnel as civilians. A paramedic or firefighter attacked during a call may use force - including deadly force when the threshold is met - to defend themselves or a partner. No occupational restriction limits this right. Alabama's framework is among the most protective for first responders in the country.

Ala. Code S. 13A-3-23(b) - Stand Your Ground (No Duty to Retreat)

"A person who is justified under subsection (a) in using physical force, including deadly physical force, and who is not engaged in an unlawful activity and is in any place where he or she has the right to be has no duty to retreat and has the right to stand his or her ground." - Ala. Code S. 13A-3-23(b)

This applies at every lawful location where a first responder is deployed - a patient's home, a roadway scene, a hospital corridor, a fire station, or any public space. No retreat is required before using justified force.

Castle Doctrine - Ala. Code S. 13A-3-23(a)(3) - Presumption in Protected Spaces

Alabama's Castle Doctrine extends to home, occupied vehicle, and place of business. When an unlawful and forcible entry occurs into these protected spaces, the law creates a PRESUMPTION that the occupant had a reasonable fear of imminent peril. The prosecution must overcome this presumption.

- Dwelling - any private residence or structure used for habitation.
- Occupied Vehicle - any motor vehicle, including an ambulance or fire apparatus.
- Place of Business - place of employment, including fire station or EMS base.

AMBULANCE AS CASTLE:

Alabama's Castle Doctrine explicitly covers occupied vehicles. A violent forced entry into your occupied ambulance activates the presumption of reasonable fear. Combined with Stand Your Ground protections, Alabama EMS and fire crews have exceptionally strong legal protections when attacked in or near their vehicles.

Ala. Code S. 13A-3-23(d) - Civil and Criminal Immunity

"A person who uses force, including deadly force, as justified and permitted in this section is immune from criminal prosecution and civil action for the use of such force, unless the force was determined to be unlawful." - Ala. Code S. 13A-3-23(d)

Alabama provides dual immunity - both from criminal prosecution and civil lawsuits - for justified force. The pre-trial immunity hearing under S. 13A-3-27 allows dismissal before trial by proving force was justified by a preponderance of evidence. Alabama's framework is among the most protective in the country.

PART II: DUTY TO RETREAT - ALABAMA'S POSITION

Alabama has NO duty to retreat. Period.

- You are NOT required to attempt escape before using force at any location where you are lawfully present.
- Your failure to retreat CANNOT be used against you in any criminal or civil proceeding.

- These protections apply at every EMS scene, fire scene, hospital, station, or public space in Alabama.
- Exception: You cannot claim Stand Your Ground if you were the initial aggressor, if you were engaged in unlawful activity, or if the person was a law enforcement officer performing lawful duties.

PART III: FIRST RESPONDER ASSAULT - ENHANCED CRIMINAL PROTECTIONS

Ala. Code S. 13A-6-21(a)(4) - Assault 2nd Degree: Intent to Prevent EMS/Fire from Performing Duties

A person commits Assault in the Second Degree when, with intent to prevent emergency medical personnel or a firefighter from performing a lawful duty, they cause physical injury to any person. This is a Class C Felony carrying 1-10 years imprisonment and fines up to \$15,000. The victim must be performing a lawful duty; being in uniform or operating a marked vehicle satisfies the knowledge requirement.

Ala. Code S. 13A-5-49(14) - Capital Aggravating Circumstance

When a first responder is killed while performing official duties, this constitutes a capital aggravating circumstance under Alabama's death penalty statute. 'First responder' explicitly includes EMS personnel licensed by the Alabama Department of Public Health, firefighters, and volunteer firefighters. This is the highest criminal consequence under Alabama law for attacks on first responders.

Ala. Code S. 13A-6-30 - Chemical Endangerment of a First Responder

Alabama specifically criminalizes using or exposing a first responder to chemical substances. This addresses scenarios where chemical agents, synthetic drugs, or hazardous substances are weaponized against EMS crews.

TRAINER EMPHASIS POINT:

Alabama's assault-of-first-responder framework covers both intentional injury (felony) and the capital aggravating circumstance for death. Even Assault 2nd Degree for intentional interference with a first responder's lawful duties is a Class C Felony. The law creates serious, escalating consequences for any level of assault on an on-duty EMS or fire provider.

PART IV: POLICE USE OF FORCE & NECK RESTRAINT FRAMEWORK

Alabama does NOT have a statewide statutory ban on chokeholds or carotid restraints. Unlike Minnesota, California, Illinois, Colorado, and Texas, Alabama has not enacted legislation specifically restricting police neck restraints beyond the general use-of-force framework. Neck restraint policy is governed by individual agency policies and APOSTC (Alabama Peace Officers Standards and Training Commission) training standards.

- NO statewide statutory chokehold ban as of 2024-2025.
- Neck restraints classified as deadly force by APOSTC standards; permissible only when deadly force is justified.
- Individual agency policies may restrict further, but no statute mandates it.

FIRST RESPONDERS VS. LAW ENFORCEMENT:

Alabama's law enforcement use-of-force framework does not apply to civilian first responders in personal self-defense. An EMS provider or firefighter who uses physical defensive techniques in lawful self-defense is evaluated only under S. 13A-3-23. There is no statutory restriction on civilian Alabama first responders using any defensive technique - including neck control - in a genuine life-safety defense situation.

PART V: APPLYING VEST PRINCIPLES UNDER ALABAMA LAW

Alabama's self-defense framework is among the most protective for first responders in the country. Stand Your Ground applies everywhere, the Castle Doctrine covers vehicles and workplaces with a presumption of reasonable fear, and dual civil/criminal immunity is available for justified force.

1. You Have the Legal Right to Defend Yourself - Anywhere You Operate

Ala. Code S. 13A-3-23(b) gives every Alabama EMS and fire responder the right to stand their ground at any lawful location. No retreat is required before using justified force. VEST training reinforces this right through situational awareness, graduated force continuum, and verbal de-escalation as the preferred first response - not because the law requires retreat, but because professional restraint is both ethical and legally advantageous.

2. Your Ambulance and Station Are Protected Spaces

Alabama's Castle Doctrine presumption covers occupied vehicles and places of business. A violent forced entry into your ambulance or a threatened intrusion into your station triggers the presumption of reasonable fear. VEST compartment security and station access protocols directly support the factual record for this protection.

3. De-Escalation Is Professional and Legally Sound

Even with no duty to retreat, Alabama's force standard requires proportionality. VEST Level I verbal de-escalation curriculum is not just tactically sound - it creates an evidentiary record that your use of force was truly necessary. Document every verbal intervention attempt before force was required.

4. Protect Your Partner - Defense of Others Is Fully Covered

Ala. Code S. 13A-3-23(a) explicitly covers defense of third persons. A VEST-trained provider who uses force to protect a partner from violent attack has direct statutory authority. VEST Level III partner defense training is backed by this statute.

5. Dual Immunity - Document to Preserve It

Alabama's S. 13A-3-23(d) provides immunity from both criminal prosecution and civil lawsuits. This immunity is not automatic - it requires demonstrating that force was justified. PCR narratives, incident reports, partner statements, and supervisor notifications are the evidentiary record that sustains the immunity claim. Document thoroughly, immediately, and specifically.

6. Know When Force Ends

Alabama's self-defense justification is tied to preventing or terminating the unlawful threat. Once a subject is restrained, compliant, or no longer capable of harm, the justification ends. VEST curriculum's continuous threat reassessment framework is both operationally and legally essential. Continuing force after neutralization defeats

the S. 13A-3-23 justification.

7. The Uniform Matters - Constructive Knowledge of Status

Alabama's assault statute requires that the attacker knew or had reason to know the victim was emergency personnel performing official duties. Operating in uniform, in a marked vehicle, or with visible agency identification satisfies this standard and strengthens prosecution of any attacker. VEST trainers should reinforce that uniform discipline has direct legal significance.

LEGAL DISCLAIMER

This document is produced by VEST First Responder LLC for educational and trainer development purposes only. It does not constitute legal advice. Alabama Criminal Code, Ala. Code Title 13A statutes are subject to legislative amendment, and individual incidents are always fact-specific. VEST Certified Trainers and their agencies should consult with a licensed attorney, their medical director, and agency legal counsel before developing or delivering formal use-of-force or defensive tactics policies.

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