§ 20-129. Required lighting equipment of vehicles.

(a) When Vehicles Must Be Equipped. – Every vehicle upon a highway within this State shall be equipped with lighted headlamps and rear lamps as required for different classes of vehicles, and subject to exemption with reference to lights on parked vehicles as declared in G.S. 20-134:

(1) During the period from sunset to sunrise,

(2) When there is not sufficient light to render clearly discernible any person on the highway at a distance of 400 feet ahead, or

(3) Repealed by Session Laws 1989 (Reg. Sess., 1990), c. 822, s. 1.

(4) At any other time when windshield wipers are in use as a result of smoke, fog, rain, sleet, or snow, or when inclement weather or environmental factors severely reduce the ability to clearly discern persons and vehicles on the street and highway at a distance of 500 feet ahead, provided, however, the provisions of this subdivision shall not apply to instances when windshield wipers are used intermittently in misting rain, sleet, or snow. Any person violating this subdivision during the period from October 1, 1990, through December 31, 1991, shall be given a warning of the violation only. Thereafter, any person violating this subdivision shall have committed an infraction and shall pay a fine of five dollars ($5.00) and shall not be assessed court costs. No drivers license points, insurance points or premium surcharge shall be assessed on account of violation of this subdivision and no negligence or liability shall be assessed on or imputed to any party on account of a violation of this subdivision. The Commissioner of Motor Vehicles and the Superintendent of Public Instruction shall incorporate into driver education programs and driver licensing programs instruction designed to encourage compliance with this subdivision as an important means of reducing accidents by making vehicles more discernible during periods of limited visibility.

(b) Headlamps on Motor Vehicles. – Every self-propelled motor vehicle other than motorcycles, road machinery, and farm tractors shall be equipped with at least two headlamps, all in good operating condition with at least one on each side of the front of the motor vehicle. Headlamps shall comply with the requirements and limitations set forth in G.S. 20-131 or 20-132.

(c) Headlamps on Motorcycles. – Every motorcycle shall be equipped with at least one and not more than two headlamps which shall comply with the requirements and limitations set forth in G.S. 20-131 or 20-132. The headlamps on a motorcycle shall be lighted at all times while the motorcycle is in operation on highways or public vehicular areas. For purposes of this section, the term "motorcycle" shall not include autocycles. Autocycles shall be subject to the requirements under this section for motor vehicles.

(d) Rear Lamps. – Every motor vehicle, and every trailer or semitrailer attached to a motor vehicle and every vehicle which is being drawn at the end of a combination of vehicles, shall have all originally equipped rear lamps or the equivalent in good working order, which lamps shall exhibit a red light plainly visible under normal atmospheric conditions from a distance of 500 feet to the rear of such vehicle. One rear lamp or a separate lamp shall be so constructed and placed that the number plate carried on the rear of such vehicle shall under like conditions be illuminated by a white light as to be read from a distance of 50 feet to the rear of such vehicle. Every trailer or semitrailer shall carry at the rear, in addition to the originally equipped lamps, a red reflector of the type which has been approved by the Commissioner and which is so located as to height and is so maintained as to be visible for at least 500 feet when

opposed by a motor vehicle displaying lawful undimmed lights at night on an unlighted highway.

Notwithstanding the provisions of the first paragraph of this subsection, it shall not be necessary for a trailer weighing less than 4,000 pounds, or a trailer described in G.S. 20-51(6) weighing less than 6,500 pounds, to carry or be equipped with a rear lamp, provided such vehicle is equipped with and carries at the rear two red reflectors of a diameter of not less than three inches, such reflectors to be approved by the Commissioner, and which are so designed and located as to height and are maintained so that each reflector is visible for at least 500 feet when approached by a motor vehicle displaying lawful undimmed headlights at night on an unlighted highway.

The rear lamps of a motorcycle shall be lighted at all times while the motorcycle is in operation on highways or public vehicular areas.

(e) Lamps on Bicycles. – Every bicycle shall be equipped with a reflex mirror on the rear and both of the following when operated at night on any public street, public vehicular area, or public greenway:

(1) A lighted lamp on the front thereof, visible under normal atmospheric conditions from a distance of at least 300 feet in front of such bicycle.

(2) A lamp on the rear, exhibiting a red light visible under like conditions from a distance of at least 300 feet to the rear of such bicycle, or the operator must wear clothing or a vest that is bright and visible from a distance of at least 300 feet to the rear of the bicycle.

(f) Lights on Other Vehicles. – All vehicles not heretofore in this section required to be equipped with specified lighted lamps shall carry on the left side one or more lighted lamps or lanterns projecting a white light, visible under normal atmospheric conditions from a distance of not less than 500 feet to the front of such vehicle and visible under like conditions from a distance of not less than 500 feet to the rear of such vehicle, or in lieu of said lights shall be equipped with reflectors of a type which is approved by the Commissioner. Farm tractors operated on a highway at night must be equipped with at least one white lamp visible at a distance of 500 feet from the front of the tractor and with at least one red lamp visible at a distance of 500 feet to the rear of the tractor. Two red reflectors each having a diameter of at least four inches may be used on the rear of the tractor in lieu of the red lamp.

(g) No person shall sell or operate on the highways of the State any motor vehicle manufactured after December 31, 1955, and on or before December 31, 1970, unless it shall be equipped with a stop lamp on the rear of the vehicle. No person shall sell or operate on the highways of the State any motor vehicle, manufactured after December 31, 1970, unless it shall be equipped with stop lamps, one on each side of the rear of the vehicle. No person shall sell or operate on the highways of the State any motorcycle or motor-driven cycle, manufactured after December 31, 1955, unless it shall be equipped with a stop lamp on the rear of the motorcycle or motor-driven cycle. The stop lamps shall emit, reflect, or display a red or amber light visible from a distance of not less than 100 feet to the rear in normal sunlight, and shall be actuated upon application of the service (foot) brake. The stop lamps may be incorporated into a unit with one or more other rear lamps.

(h) Backup Lamps. – Every motor vehicle originally equipped with white backup lamps shall have those lamps in operating condition. (1937, c. 407, s. 92; 1939, c. 275; 1947, c. 526; 1955, c. 1157, ss. 3-5, 8; 1957, c. 1038, s. 1; 1967, cc. 1076, 1213; 1969, c. 389; 1973, c. 531, ss. 1, 2; 1979, c. 175; 1981, c. 549, s. 1; 1985, c. 66; 1987, c. 611; 1989 (Reg. Sess., 1990), c. 822, s. 1; 1991, c. 18, s. 1; 1999-281, s. 1; 2015-31, s. 1; 2015-163, s. 6; 2015-241, s. 29.36B(a); 2016-90, s. 5.1(a); 2017-211, s. 12(a).)