

2.1.1 Routine and Emergency Call Response

I. POLICY

All officers operating department vehicles shall exercise due regard for the safety of all persons: protection of life is the paramount goal of the department. No task, call or incident justifies disregard of public safety. Further, the public expects its law enforcement officers to demonstrate exemplary driving skills. All officers who operate department vehicles will comply with safe driving procedures outlined herein with particular attention to responding to calls for service or engaging in pursuits. Emergency warning devices shall be used consistent with both legal requirements and the safety of the public and officers.

II PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide officers with guidelines, in conformance with the Pennsylvania Vehicle Code, as to when emergency lights and siren should be used and the method of response to an incident. All officers operating department vehicles shall exercise due regard for the safety of all persons.

III. DEFINITIONS

1. **Emergency Driving:** That driving in response to a life threatening or other serious incident [based on available information], which requires emergency equipment in operation.
2. **Emergency Equipment:** Flickering, blinking or alternating emergency lights and a siren, whistle or air horn designed to give intermittent signals automatically. All marked vehicles have distinctive, reflectorized decals for additional visibility. In this order, an authorized emergency vehicle is one that is equipped with emergency equipment.
3. **Normal or Routine Driving:** That driving which dictates vehicle speed consistent with the normal flow of traffic, obedience to vehicle laws and posted signs, adherence to commonly understood "Rules of the Road".
4. **Roadblock:** Any method, restriction or obstruction used to prevent free passage of vehicles on a roadway in order to stop a suspect.

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IV. GENERAL PROCEDURES FOR ALL RESPONSES

A. General

1. All departmental vehicles shall be driven safely and properly in full compliance with all traffic laws and regulations. Department vehicles are conspicuous symbols of authority on the streets and many people observe an officer's actions. Each officer must set an example of good driving behavior and habits.
2. Under certain emergencies as defined below, the Pennsylvania Vehicle Code Title 75, authorized officers to disregard traffic regulations. Both the operator and the department, however, are not released from civil liability for failure to use reasonable care in such operation.

B. Routine Operation

1. In case of accident or damage to any department vehicle, the driver shall immediately request the on-duty supervisor to conduct an investigation. A copy of the completed accident report will be forwarded to the Chief of Police via the chain of command. The Chief of Police shall insure that all accidents are reviewed and that appropriate action is taken when necessary.
2. Vehicles used in routine or general patrol service shall be conspicuously marked.
3. Unmarked cars should not be used for pursuit, but may be used for patrol.
4. Standard lighting equipment on marked vehicles includes hazardous warning lights, spotlights and alley [side] lights on the rooftop light bar. Hazardous warning lights may be used at any time the department vehicle is parked where other moving vehicles may be endangered. Alley lights and spotlights may be used when the vehicle is stationary or moving at speeds not to exceed 15 miles per hour and shall not be used in a manner, which will blind or interfere with the vision of operators of other approaching vehicles.
5. During vehicle operations seat belts and shoulder straps shall be worn by all personnel and ride-along persons. Prisoners should be strapped in with seat belts whenever possible.

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- a. Exception: When approaching an incident scene or a call where the officer believes that a rapid exit from the vehicle may be required, the officer may release the seat belt.

C. Inspection

1. Before each duty assignment, officers shall check their vehicles for cleanliness and operability of all equipment. Officers shall also ensure that vehicles have adequate levels of oil, brake fluid, power steering fluid and gas.
2. Officers shall check the safety features of the vehicle before assuming duty. The check shall include [but not limited to] all lights, brakes, siren, horn and steering.
3. Officers shall examine their vehicles at the beginning and end of their shifts for damage. Officers shall report any damage immediately to the on-duty supervisor.
4. Officers shall examine their vehicles at the beginning and end of their shifts to search for evidence, contraband or property discarded by prisoners or others. Rear seats shall be thoroughly checked.
5. Officers who discover a department vehicle in need of repairs shall immediately inform the on-duty supervisor.
6. If in the opinion of the chief of police, vehicle damage resulted from abuse or neglect caused by an officer, disciplinary action may result.
7. No driver shall modify, remove, de-activate, or otherwise tamper with the vehicle safety belts, emission control device, or any part of the vehicle, which affects its operation.
8. During periods of inclement weather when department vehicles cannot be washed regularly, the driver must ensure that headlight and taillight lenses are kept clean, insofar as circumstances permit.
9. No officer or employee shall operate any department vehicle that he or she believes to be unsafe.

D. Driving Rules

1. The driver shall carefully observe the surrounding conditions before turning or backing any vehicle.
2. A department vehicle should not be left unattended with the engine running nor shall the vehicle be left unlocked when the officer has left it to handle other business other than emergency situations.

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3. The driver must recognize the variable factors of weather, road surface conditions, road contour and traffic congestion, all of which directly affect the safe operation of any motor vehicle and shall govern the operation of the vehicle accordingly.
4. Officers responding to certain crimes-in-progress sometimes discontinue the use of the siren upon approaching the location of the occurrence. Officers shall understand that to do so means that, per Title 75, they are no longer operating an emergency vehicle and thus are not afforded the protection of Subsection 3105 [c] and therefore are to observe all posted speeds and traffic control devices.
5. Emergency driving to the scene of a motor vehicle accident is permissible **only** when an emergency exists, when specific information indicates that conditions at the scene require an emergency response, or when directed to do so by a supervisor.
6. Upon approaching a controlled intersection or other location where there is great possibility of collision because of traffic congestion, the emergency driver shall reduce the speed of the vehicle, stopping completely, if necessary, before entering and traversing the intersection. When faced with a red traffic signal or stop sign, however, the officer shall stop his or her vehicle and ensure by careful observation that the way is clear before proceeding through the intersection.
7. Regardless of the seriousness of the situation to which the officer is responding and excepting circumstances that are clearly beyond the officer's control, he or she shall be held accountable for the manner in which he or she operates the vehicle.
8. At the scene of a crime, a motor vehicle crash or other incident, a department vehicle shall be parked in such a manner so as not to create an obstacle or hazard to other traffic, unless necessary for the protection of an incident scene or injured persons. If a traffic hazard exists, the emergency lights and four-ways shall be used to warn other drivers approaching that location.
9. Circumstances permitting, during emergency responses or pursuits, the driver may lower one front door window far enough to hear other sirens and traffic warning signals.
10. Operators of department vehicles must bear in mind that traffic regulations requiring other vehicles to yield the right of way to any emergency vehicle do not relieve the emergency vehicle operator from the duty to drive with due regard for the safety of all persons using the

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highways, nor shall they protect the driver from the consequences of an arbitrary exercise of such right of way.

V. PROCEDURES FOR EMERGENCY DRIVING

A. General

Under certain emergencies, the Pennsylvania Vehicle Code authorizes the breaking of traffic regulations by police personnel. However, both the operator and the department are not released from civil liability for failure to use reasonable care. Recognizing that protection of human life is paramount, the responding officer must remember that his/her objective is to get to the location of the occurrence as soon as possible, safely without danger to the officer or to others.

1. No fixed rule can apply to every circumstance that may arise governing emergency driving. Although an officer may receive information that leads him/her to respond to a call with emergency lights and siren activated, in the majority of such cases an officer discovers, upon arrival, that an emergency response was not justified.
2. Title 75, section 3105[b] Exercise of special privileges – The driver of an emergency police vehicle may:
 - a. Park or stand, irrespective of the provisions of this code.
 - b. Proceed past a red light or stop sign after slowing down as necessary for safe operation.
 - c. Exceed the maximum speed limits, so long as drive does not endanger life or property.
 - d. Disregard regulations governing direction of movement or turning in specific directions.
3. Title 75, section 3105[c] Audible and visual signals required – The privileges granted in this section to an emergency vehicle shall apply only when the vehicle is making use of an audible signal and visual signals meeting the requirements and standards set forth in regulations adopted by the department, except that an emergency vehicle operated as a police vehicle need not be equipped with or display the visual signals.

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4. Title 75, section 3105[e] Exercise of care – This section does not relieve the driver of an emergency vehicle from the duty to drive with due regard for the safety of all persons.
5. Title 75, section 3105[g] Emergency vehicle preemption devices – The department may promulgate regulations for the operation and use of preemptive traffic devices by emergency vehicles.

B. Response Codes

1. Calls for service received by dispatchers can be classified as Emergency; Priority; or Routine, depending on a variety of factors and circumstances. Vehicle operation responses will be as follows:
 - a. Emergency: Units responding to emergency calls as the primary or back-up units shall respond expeditiously to the location of the emergency, by the most direct means, using red/blue lights and siren, with a paramount consideration for the safety of the public and the assigned officers.
 - b. Priority: Units responding to priority calls shall respond to the location without delay, by the most direct means, complying with traffic regulations and shall not use red/blue lights and siren unless so authorized or directed by a supervisor.
 - c. Routine: Units responding to routine calls shall respond, complying with all traffic regulations and shall not use red/blue lights and siren.
2. Emergency classification will be assigned by the dispatcher to those calls for law enforcement service, which indicate a felony in progress, a misdemeanor in progress, where the violator is armed and all other requests alleging an implied or immediate threat to the safety of a person. Examples of emergency calls, but not all inclusive are:
 - a. An officer who needs urgent help.
 - b. A burglary in progress.
 - c. A robbery in progress.
 - d. A person with a deadly weapon.
 - e. A serious injury or fatal accident or hit & run.
 - f. A riot or large disturbance with fighting or injuries or damages occurring.
 - g. An apparent homicide.
 - h. A fight or an assault in progress.
 - i. A sex offense in progress.
 - j. An auto theft in progress.

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- k. A shoplifting involving a violent suspect.
 - l. Domestic dispute with an assault in progress, or just occurred with a suspect still present.
 - m. An in progress suicide attempt.
3. Upon receipt of a request for law enforcement service, which necessitates the dispatch of an officer, the dispatcher receiving the request should determine sufficient facts to set the priority of the response.
 - a. The dispatcher should obtain information about the following:
 - i. Whether the perpetrator is still on the scene, or armed.
 - ii. Condition of the victim.
 - iii. A possible hostage situation.
 - iv. The direction and method of travel of any fleeing suspects.
 - v. A description of any fleeing vehicles.
 4. When sufficient information concerning a request for service has been obtained, the officer shall determine which response is the proper response code. Absent any information to suggest that the call does involve an in-progress crime and absent any information that violence has been involved or is occurring, the dispatcher shall assign priority.
 5. All other calls for service shall be deemed as routine calls.

C. Officer's Response to Calls

1. Upon arrival at the scene of a call, the responding officer shall rapidly evaluate the situation and determine whether additional units are still needed or whether other units responding "Emergency" can be slowed or cancelled.
2. All units responding to a robbery or burglary in progress call, before coming within hearing distance, shall discontinue the use of the siren and at that time fully comply with all traffic laws. Before coming within sight of the location, officers shall discontinue the use of the emergency warning lights.
3. In situations requiring a silent response, e.g., alarms and prowler calls, officers shall respond as rapidly as possible, obeying all traffic laws and signs.
4. Officer – Initiated Response: When, in the opinion of the officer, an emergency is imminent or exists, or that activation of emergency warning devices is necessary to protect life or render the necessary enforcement, the department authorizes an emergency response.

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Examples Include

- a. Any incident where the use of emergency lights constitutes a necessary warning for the safety of life [such as scenes of fires, accidents or disasters].
- b. As a visual signal to attract the attention of motorists being stopped for traffic violations or to warn motorists of imminent dangers.
- c. Responding to priority calls, where the officer has previous or additional information which, had the dispatcher known it would have resulted in the call being dispatched as an emergency.
- d. Where because of location, distance to be traveled or traffic conditions the officer determines that emergency operating conditions are essential in order to provide an appropriate response.
- e. In response to an officer's emergency request for assistance.
- f. For pursuit, see Policy 2.1.2

D. Use of Emergency Warning Devices in Non-emergencies

1. Officers shall activate emergency equipment to notify drivers, that they must stop and provide a safe environment for the driver, officer and the public.
2. Officers may activate emergency equipment in non-emergencies when expediency is required to eliminate a potential hazard to the public or other officers, such as using emergency lights to protect disabled motorists or when department vehicles are used as a protective barrier.

Effective Date:

Date: June 13, 2006

By Order Of:

Craig Foust
Chief Of Police