

Anchorage Police Department Regulations and Procedures Manual	Operational Procedures 3.03.020	
Policy and Procedure Title Collision Investigation Policy	Effective Date November 1, 2022	Page 1 of 11
Replaces Prior Policy: April 1, 2017	Approved by: Chief Michael Kerle	

This policy is the internal use only and does not enlarge an employee's civil liability in any way. The policy should not be construed as creating a higher duty of care, in an evidentiary sense, with respect to third party civil claims against employees. A violation of this policy, if proven, can only form the basis of a complaint by this department for non-judicial administrative action in accordance with the laws governing employee discipline.

3.03.020 Collision Investigation Policy

PURPOSE

To instruct all personnel in the processing of traffic collisions.

POLICY

Officers will respond to reports of collisions and determine if investigation is required by the Anchorage Police Department as outlined below.

DEFINITIONS

Traffic Collision: A sequence of unintentional events involving one or more motor vehicles resulting in observable damage, injury, or death.

Non-Injury Collision: A traffic collision which results in property damage and/or physical injury so slight that medical attention would not reasonably be sought.

Injury Traffic Collision: A traffic collision resulting in physical injury great enough to warrant medical attention of any degree.

Hit and Run (H & R): The common term for the crime of "Leaving the Scene of a Collision" ("LSA"), where the operator(s) have an obligation to remain and/or leave information. Hit and run is consummated if the operator fails to remain or leave notice even on a collision so slight as to not require a formal report.

Fatal collision: Any vehicle collision where one or more persons are immediately killed, or death appears to be imminent, as a result of the collision.

Physical injury: As defined by Alaska Statute 11.81.900 (b)- "physical injury means a physical pain or an impairment of physical condition."

Serious physical injury: As defined by Alaska Statute 11.81.900(b)- "physical injury that causes serious and protracted disfigurement, protracted impairment of health, protracted loss or impairment of the function of a body member or organ, or that unlawfully terminates a pregnancy."

PROCEDURE

NON OR MINOR INJURY COLLISIONS

A. RESPONSE

1. **Dispatch.** Dispatch will send officers to reports of collisions to determine if investigation by APD is required.
 - a. Dispatch may explain to people involved in non-injury collisions that do not require an investigation by an officer how the matter can be settled without police involvement, and how to report the collision online at <http://reportcrash.alaska.gov/>.
2. **Response Code.** Non-injury and minor injury collisions are dispatched Code 2.

B. ARRIVAL AT SCENE

1. **Determine if Investigation is Required.** See section C 2 below for guidelines.
2. **Critical Initial Steps.** Even in a minor, non-injury collision investigation, the initial steps the officer takes are critical to the welfare of the public and the quality of the investigation. The following guidelines are offered:
 - a. Assess the scene from a distance as you approach. This serves to:
 - 1) Suggest the best positioning of the patrol vehicle.
 - 2) Alert officers to certain dangers, most notably:
 - a) Hazardous materials.
 - b) Power lines down.
 - c) Debris on roadway.
 - 3) Provide information for possible re-routing of traffic around the scene.
 - b. Protect the scene. The scene must be protected (by patrol car positioning and lighting, cones, flares, and/or other units) to achieve two vital purposes:
 - 1) Prevent secondary collisions, which can be more severe than the original collision; and
 - 2) Preserve evidence for the investigation.
 - c. Assess involved subjects for potential injury and the severity of injuries. With the scene protected, the medical conditions of the

victim(s) require immediate attention. For serious injury collisions, see "Serious Injury Collisions and Fatalities" of this policy.

- d. Identify the witnesses. Officers will attempt to identify and interview witnesses.
- e. Photographs. Officers shall take photographs at any collision that involves a report of injury. Officers may exercise discretion on non-injury collisions but should generally take photographs for all collisions involving government vehicles, commercial vehicles, vehicles for hire, or any collision with significant property damage.
- f. Assess Vehicle Removal. Officers should begin to assess when and how to remove the vehicle(s) and debris. In the interest of safety and traffic flow, the traffic way should be cleared as soon as possible, and officers should allow "lead time" for the towing equipment to arrive.

C. INVESTIGATING THE COLLISION

1. **Investigating Responsibility.** Patrol Officers have the primary responsibility for investigating traffic collisions; however, the Traffic Unit will assist in collisions as directed by the Traffic Unit Supervisor, especially in the event of inclement weather, Officer involved collisions, serious physical injury and fatality collisions.
2. **Criteria for Completing an Investigation and State "Report on Traffic Collision."** Department policy regarding the completion of the State Report on Traffic Collision by an Officer is as follows:
 - a. A report is required on any traffic collision when:
 - 1) Any government vehicle or commercial vehicle or for-hire vehicles (such as taxis, limos, shuttle vans) is involved, even if the parties do not want to make a report, or
 - 2) There is damage to government property, or
 - 3) There is any physical injury, even if the parties do not want to make a report, or
 - 4) A criminal offense has occurred or any party does not have proof of insurance, even if the parties do not want to make a report, or
 - 5) The involved vehicles cannot be driven away from the scene, or
 - 6) A Hit and Run collision with viable suspect information, or
 - 7) The collision was a result of any police action, with the exception of blocking, pinning, PIT maneuvers, or intentional ramming.
3. **Proper Completion of the State Report on Traffic Collision.** Officers will complete traffic collision report forms as trained and by

standards set by the Department and State of Alaska. Any officer completing a supplemental report that contains vehicle or involved person details must do so on a Supplemental Collision Report. In those cases, the officer completing the Supplemental Collision Report must coordinate with the officer submitting the Original Collision Report to ensure that vehicles and persons are numbered properly. Any other officers completing a supplemental report may do so either as a Supplemental Collision Report or as a Supplemental Incident Report.

4. Operating Under the Influence.

Officers shall follow Department OUI investigation guidelines if they suspect any impaired drivers are involved in the collision. Operating Under the Influence policy [3.01.035](#).

D. Non-Investigated Collisions

- 1. Clearing of Roadway.** Citizens should be advised by dispatch of the requirement to move their vehicles and any debris off of the roadway as soon as possible.
- 2. Private Property.** The Department will respond to collisions on private property according to the guidelines in this policy and procedure.
- 3. Hit and Run – No Suspect Information.** The Department will not respond to hit and run collisions of unoccupied victim vehicles or property damage (including government property) where there is no suspect information and no injury. If a collision occurs that otherwise meets the criteria of this section but involves an animal, an officer will respond to ensure the roadway is clear, and the animal is removed appropriately. This includes but is not limited to, dispatching of wildlife, calling a charity, transporting a domestic animal to animal control or to an emergency veterinarian service if such a facility is willing to accept an injured animal without owner information.
- 4. Notification.** Involved citizens will be given an APD Collision Information Card that directs them to report the crash and complete a Notice of Financial Responsibility form online at <http://reportcrash.alaska.gov/>.
- 5. Verification of Information.** Officers will verify that the driver and vehicle information that the citizens exchange is correct and accurate, that the proof of insurance for each driver appears valid, and that no criminal activity has occurred. Officers will include the vehicle, driver, and insurance information in CAD before going 10-8. Upon leaving the scene of the collision, officers will notify dispatch that the information was verified by using the CAD disposition code "V", i.e. "10-8V".

E. DISPOSITION

1. **Vehicle Removal.** Clearing the collision scene as quickly as practical is in the best interest of safety and traffic flow. Once officers have gained the physical evidence necessary including Evidence tags for the investigation, effort should be made to move the remaining vehicles. The following guidelines are provided:
 - a. The law requires the operators of vehicles involved in traffic collisions to not unnecessarily obstruct traffic (AMC 9.10.020). Dispatch should encourage citizens to move their vehicles off of the roadway if possible.
 - b. Drivers should not generally be allowed or given permission to leave the vehicle on the side of the road as it is inherently subject to vandalism and theft. An exception to that is **during rush hour or immediately preceding**, if the vehicle is not impeding or endangering traffic, it is not subject to other impounds such as OUI/DWLR/DWOI/Scofflaw, and the removal of such vehicle would **unnecessarily delay** commuting traffic.
 - c. With the owner's permission, officers may consider pushing a disabled vehicle out of the roadway if their patrol vehicle is capable, to reduce the obstruction of traffic. A Push Bumper Liability Waiver is required prior to such action.
 - d. If the officer decides that towing is required for any reason, the following would apply:
 - 1) Assist the operator in summoning the towing company of their choice. If the operator has no preference but is still willing and able to take responsibility of the vehicle, then the Dispatch approved tow agency rotation list may be used.
 - 2) If the owner/operator is unwilling or unable to make these arrangements, the officer may impound the vehicle for safekeeping. For details, consult the procedure "Towing--Impounds".
 - 3) If the vehicle is subject to public safety impound for OUI/DWLR/DWOI/Scofflaw or otherwise, then this action supersedes an owner preference or no preference option.
2. **Issuing Citations.** It is firm Departmental policy to issue citations for traffic violations at collisions if the evidence concludes such violation(s) occurred. Be reminded:
 - a. Citations may be issued to more than one operator.
 - b. Citations can be issued at a later date if the investigation is not completed at the scene.
 - c. Citations should not be issued if the collision is not investigated by APD and documented on a State of Alaska collision form.

- d. Citations should not be issued to any driver of an emergency vehicle involved in a collision.
 - e. Citations should not be issued to any person engaged in maintenance on or under a street or on a trail, or when traveling to or from such a worksite. This exception does not apply to offenses related to reporting a crash or remaining at a crash site from AMC Title 9 Chapter 10, Driver's licensing requirements from AMC Title 9 Chapter 12, or serious offenses from AMC Title 9, Chapter 28.
- 3. Notice of the requirement for "Certificate of Insurance" forms** (i.e. "Financial Responsibility Notices"). The operator of a vehicle involved in a collision investigated by APD shall be advised via an APD Collision Information Card to go online to <http://reportcrash.alaska.gov/> to complete the certificate of insurance form and submit it to the Department of Motor Vehicles. Operators who do not submit this form to the State of Alaska will have their license suspended as an uninsured motorist. If a citizen does not have reasonable access to the internet, an officer may print the Notice of Financial Responsibility form from the aforementioned website to provide them.
- 4. Arrests.** Recall that some traffic violations are criminal (versus infraction or civil), so arrests can occur. Should the officer make a traffic arrest:
- a. Some arrests can be concluded with Misdemeanor Citations or with OR Release paperwork.
 - b. Juveniles arrested under the traffic code are processed identically to their adult counterparts, including the issuance of the various citations, with two exceptions:
 - 1) Parent(s) must appear with the minor in any court appearances the minor might have; and
 - 2) If a booking is ordered or required, it shall occur at McLaughlin Youth Center, Arrests—Juveniles 3.02.020.
- 5. Public Assistance.** Prior to leaving the scene, officers should be available to provide reasonable assistance to the collision victims. Also, ensure that the parties have exchanged the information required by law, such as name, contact info, insurance info, etc.
- 6. Return of Property.** Officers should ensure that all property has been returned to the correct owner. Note especially operator's licenses, registrations, keys, and other items normally needed by officers. This would, of course, exclude property retained as evidence.
- 7. Notifications.** In any collision investigated by APD, each party will be advised of the police report case number by the officer, and that copies of the collision report will be available at the front counter of the police

station at a later date and can be requested by mail, email or in person, or may be accessed online.

8. **Road Debris.** AMC 9.36.100 (C) states "Any person removing a wrecked or damaged vehicle from a publicly maintained street shall remove any glass or other injurious substances dropped upon the highway from such vehicle." Officers are to enforce this provision, as it applies to both towing equipment operators and private individuals. In any case where substantial debris is left on the roadway, or if the road or traffic equipment is damaged, officers should notify the appropriate agency.

F. MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES

1. **Collisions Not Investigated at the Scene.** Dispatch or an officer will inform the party or parties of their obligation to complete form 12-209, Motor Vehicle Crash Form, online at <http://reportcrash.alaska.gov/>. Officers will not investigate a non-injury collision where the parties agreed to party settle and have left the scene prior to APD arrival.
2. **Special Vehicles.** When investigating collisions involving the following vehicles, officers must comply with the special considerations listed:
 - a. Alaska Railroad and Alaska Railroad vehicles.
 - 1) Anticipate the railroad sending its Special Agent.
 - 2) Expect the operator to refuse to answer questions until the Special Agent arrives. The operator is instructed not to discuss the incident until that Special Agent arrives, and it is Departmental policy to honor that procedure.
 - 3) List involved railroad personnel (engineer, conductor, etc.) on an Additional Information form instead of the State Traffic Collision form. The State has specific definitions of "operator" and "driver," and a determination has to be made later as to who was actually "operating" the train.
 - b. Postal vehicles.
 - 1) Anticipate the Postal authorities dispatching a Postal Inspector.
 - 2) Honor the operator's company policy not to discuss the incident until that Postal Inspector arrives.

SERIOUS INJURY COLLISIONS & FATALITIES

Response to collisions involving injuries, serious injuries, and fatalities will be conducted as indicated above with the following exceptions.

A. RESPONSE

1. **Response Code.** Suspected serious injury collisions or unknown injury collisions are dispatched Code 3
 - a. As with any call, arriving safely is a primary consideration.
 - b. Arriving officers should consider reducing the code of any other responding units as soon as practical, including the medical unit(s), if the injuries are minor.
2. **Serious Injuries and Fatalities.** Once it is determined that a collision involves a serious physical injury or a fatality, officers should notify a shift Supervisor to initiate contact with the Traffic Unit Supervisor. Refer to Traffic Unit Coordination policy 3.09.030.
3. **Operating Under the Influence.**

Officers shall follow Department OUI investigation guidelines if they suspect any impaired drivers are involved in the collision and coordinate with a Supervisor. Operating Under the Influence policy 3.01.035.

B. ARRIVAL AT SCENE

1. **Critical Initial Steps.** The initial steps the officer takes are critical to the welfare of the public and the quality of the investigation. The following guidelines are offered:
 - a. Assess the scene from a distance as you approach. This serves to:
 - 1) Suggest the best positioning of the patrol vehicle.
 - 2) Alert officers to certain dangers, most notably:
 - a) Hazardous materials.
 - b) Power lines down.
 - c) Debris on roadway.
 - 3) Provide information for possible re-routing of traffic around the scene.
 - b. Protect the scene. The scene must be protected (by patrol car positioning and lighting, cones, flares, and/or other units) to achieve two vital purposes:
 - 1) Prevent secondary collisions, which can be more severe than the original collision; and
 - 2) Preserve evidence for the investigation. Recall that a serious injury traffic collision is to be regarded as a felony crime scene until evidence concludes otherwise.

- c. Attend to medical assistance. With the scene protected, the victim(s) can be given medical attention. Officers are reminded that, if the injuries are in fact minor, reducing the code of the responding medical unit is best for overall safety.
- d. Identify the witnesses. Since many witnesses are reluctant to remain at the scene or volunteer information, responding officers should immediately begin identifying and interviewing witnesses. For serious and fatal collisions which the Traffic Unit will investigate, officers may do the initial interviewing for the Traffic Unit. For collisions with fatal or potentially fatal accidents, or for any collision involving injuries which require hospitalization, **all interviews with drivers, witnesses, or passengers shall be recorded and submitted as per the APD digital evidence policy.**
- e. Photographs. Officers shall take photographs at any collision that involves a report of injury. If the Traffic Unit is responding to a serious or fatal crash, initial photographs of the scene can be very useful and should still be taken by patrol.
- f. Notifications. Should the collision result in critical injuries or death, the responding officer should coordinate with a shift Supervisor to notify the Traffic Unit Supervisor. Refer to Traffic Unit Coordination Procedure 3.09.030.
- g. Implied Consent Blood Draws. Responding officers should follow established guidelines for implied consent blood draws for serious injury and fatality collisions. If it is determined that a collision meets those guidelines, the blood draw process may be started immediately. **Officers shall coordinate the blood draw with the Traffic Unit Fatality Investigator assigned to the collision when The Traffic Unit assumes responsibility for a collision.**
 - 1) **Officers who complete a blood draw shall fill out a lab request form, to have the blood tested, at the time the evidence is submitted to Property and Evidence and submit a copy of the corresponding search warrant or signed consent form.**
- h. Assess vehicle removal. Officers should begin to assess when and how to remove the vehicle(s) and debris. Unlike a minor collision, a serious collision can entail protracted crime scene processing and/or impoundment for evidence, so this consideration may be more detailed. However, in the interest of safety and convenience, the traffic-way should be cleared as soon as practical. **Officer shall coordinate vehicle removal with the Fatality Investigator if a traffic call out has been initiated.**

C. INVESTIGATING THE COLLISION

1. **Investigating Responsibility.** Patrol Officers have the primary responsibility for investigating traffic collisions, however, Serious Injury Collisions and Fatalities may be handled by a Traffic Unit call out. Refer to Traffic Unit Coordination Policy 3.09.030.
2. **Officer's Duties after Notification of Traffic Unit.** The Traffic Unit may delegate the investigation to Patrol. Should the Traffic Unit assume responsibility, however, the officer's primary duties are those listed in Section B. above (protect scene, secure witnesses, attend to medical attention, etc.).
3. **Completing a State "Report on Traffic Collision."** A collision report will be made on any collision involving an injury.
4. **Proper Completion of the State Report on Traffic Collision.** Officers will complete traffic collision report forms as trained and by standards set by the Department and State of Alaska.
 - a. **In the event of a Traffic Unit call out to complete a serious injury or fatality collision investigation, responding patrol officers will still be required to complete the collision report for all vehicles involved including their drivers and passengers. Any witness interviewed by patrol should also be included in a collision report or supplemental collision report.**

D. DISPOSITION

1. **General Disposition.** For details on disposition see Section I. The following differences are noted for injury, serious injury, and fatality collisions.
2. **Vehicle Removal.** Vehicle removal is the same as in Section I except for the requirement to coordinate with the Fatality Investigator if the Traffic Unit has been called out.
3. **Issuing Citations.** It is firm Departmental policy to issue citations for traffic violations at collisions if the evidence concludes such violation(s) occurred. Be reminded:
 - a. Citations may be issued to more than one operator.
 - b. Citations can be issued at a later date if the investigation is not completed at the scene.
 - c. **Citations should not be issued when a criminal offense is believed to have occurred, or if the Traffic Unit has assumed responsibility for the investigation.**
4. **Return of Property.** Return of property should be coordinated to ensure that it does not interfere with any criminal investigation that may result from the collision.

Road Debris. Road debris should be handled as indicated in Section I except that it should not be moved until the investigation has been completed.

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