




ARLINGTON COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT DIRECTIVE MANUAL

Chapter: 5 <i>Procedures</i>	Revision Date: <i>August 22, 2025</i>	Initiation Date: <i>March 1, 2005</i>	By Authority of the Chief of Police  Chief Charles A. Penn
Accreditation Standard(s): 41.2.2 (CALEA)			

517.03 Vehicle Pursuit

I. Overview

This directive provides direction to Arlington County Police Department (the Department) officers related to the engagement of vehicle pursuits.

II. Policy

Officers may engage in vehicle pursuits, in certain limited circumstances, when necessary to apprehend criminal law violators. However, vehicle pursuits present an inherent risk of danger to officers, suspects, and the community. Officers and supervisors shall carefully evaluate the risks and circumstances associated with each vehicle pursuit and shall not begin or continue a vehicle pursuit if the danger posed by the pursuit is unreasonable or outweighs the value of an immediate apprehension. An appropriate balance shall be struck between these competing interests and efforts to prevent vehicle pursuits whenever reasonably available.

III. Definitions

- A. Emergency Equipment – Front and rear emergency lights and sirens installed in a Department vehicle.
- B. Fleeing – Driving a vehicle to avoid apprehension by making evasive maneuvers, increasing speed, and/or violating traffic laws.
- C. Following – A driving action whereby an officer in a Department vehicle is following, but not attempting to stop, a vehicle.
- D. Rolling Roadblock – A technique in which Department vehicles are positioned and gradually slowed around a vehicle whose driver is evading a stop attempt by law enforcement.
- E. Stationary Roadblock – Intentional obstruction of a roadway to cause a fleeing motorist to voluntarily stop or, failing that, be stopped through the threat of impact (or impact) with the blocking Department vehicles and/or other fixed objects.
- F. Stationary Tire Deflation Device – A device deployed against a stationary vehicle that deflates the tires if the vehicle is moved.
- G. Trailing – An active attempt by an officer driving a Department vehicle to stop a vehicle whose driver is not stopping but not fleeing.
- H. Vehicle Pursuit – An officer in an authorized emergency vehicle attempting to apprehend a suspect who is actively fleeing while operating a vehicle.
- I. Vehicle Immobilization – Surrounding a stationary, stopped, or stopping motor vehicle with Department vehicles or other barriers to prevent it from moving.

IV. Procedures

- A. **Vehicle Pursuits** - When engaged in a vehicle pursuit, officers must operate the vehicle with due regard for safety and in a manner consistent with [Directive Manual 517.02 - Department Vehicles](#) section IV.B.2 - Emergency Response.
1. Criteria for Pursuits inside Arlington County:
 - a. Decision to Pursue - Officers may engage in a vehicle pursuit when probable cause exists that a driver or occupant of a vehicle has committed, is committing, or currently has arrest warrants on file for: [41.2.2, b]
 - 1) Any violent felony; or
 - 2) Any offense involving the use or threatened use of a firearm.
 - 3) Officers may also engage in a vehicle pursuit to abate the danger of a substantial likelihood of death or serious bodily injury created by the vehicle to be pursued.
 - a) Vehicle pursuits conducted under this subsection must be approved by the Watch Commander and are permitted only to try to stop the vehicle using tactical measures authorized by this section.
 - b. Officers are not permitted to briefly pursue a vehicle or trail a vehicle with emergency equipment activated for the sole purpose of performing a wanted check on the driver or occupant to determine if they are wanted for any of the above listed offenses.
 2. Criteria for Continuing Pursuits into Other Virginia Jurisdictions:
 - a. The criteria for continuation of a pursuit into another Virginia jurisdiction is the same as the criteria for pursuits inside Arlington County.
 - b. When it appears likely that a pursuit will leave Arlington County, the pursuing officer shall notify the Emergency Communications Center (ECC), who shall contact the police agency for the jurisdiction about to be entered.
 - c. Department units will discontinue a pursuit as soon as the agency with primary jurisdiction has engaged in the pursuit or Department units have been notified by radio or otherwise recognize that their assistance is no longer needed. In that case, the primary unit will notify ECC that the transfer of responsibility of the pursuit has occurred.
 3. Criteria for Continuing Pursuits Outside Virginia:
 - a. The continuation of a pursuit outside Virginia into Maryland or the District of Columbia (DC) is authorized only when probable cause exists that the driver or occupant of the pursued vehicle has committed, or is committing, or currently has arrest warrants on file for a felony involving violence or a threat of violence (e.g. rape, robbery, malicious wounding, etc.).
 - b. When it appears likely that the pursuit will leave Virginia, the pursuing officer shall notify ECC, who in turn shall contact the police agency for the jurisdiction about to be entered.
 - c. Department units will discontinue a pursuit as soon as the agency with primary jurisdiction has engaged in the pursuit or Department units have been notified by radio or otherwise recognize that their assistance is no longer needed. In that case, the primary unit will notify ECC that the transfer of responsibility of the pursuit has occurred.
 - d. Watch Commanders are not required to terminate a pursuit that enters a surrounding state or DC even if that jurisdiction will not assist Arlington units engaged in the pursuit.
 4. Pursuit Guidelines - Officers engaged in a vehicle pursuit are in no way obligated to continue the vehicle pursuit and may terminate a vehicle pursuit upon their own authority at any time. [41.2.2, h] Additionally, they shall terminate a pursuit if it no longer meets the threshold in IV.A.1 above.
 - a. Any officer involved in the pursuit has an obligation to terminate the vehicle pursuit if continuing the vehicle pursuit would violate Department policy.
 - b. Officers shall collectively consider (and continually reassess) the following factors when deciding whether to initiate and/or continue a vehicle pursuit and weigh the risk against the value of immediate apprehension: [41.2.2, a]
 - 1) Seriousness of the crime.
 - 2) Officer Safety.
 - 3) Presence of other people (especially minors) in the pursued vehicle.
 - 4) Time of day.
 - 5) Presence of vehicle and pedestrian traffic.

- 6) Characteristics of the area (residential, commercial, school zone, etc.).
 - 7) Roadway design / condition.
 - 8) Weather / visibility.
 - 9) Condition of involved vehicles.
 - 10) Prospects for a later arrest.
 - 11) Officers' familiarity with other jurisdictions (for vehicle pursuits outside of Arlington).
 - 12) Any other factor that in the officer's judgement and discretion weighs against the value of immediate apprehension.
- c. Officers shall not join in a vehicle pursuit initiated by another law enforcement agency that enters Arlington County unless the vehicle pursuit meets the criteria in subsections IV.A.1 above. [41.2.2, j]
 - d. Officers may not initiate or participate in a vehicle pursuit unless they have completed Department-approved training. All vehicle pursuits must be conducted in accordance with such training. [41.2.2, m]
5. Vehicle Considerations - The following restrictions apply to the use of Department vehicles in vehicle pursuits:
- a. Officers shall activate emergency equipment when they engage in a vehicle pursuit and ensure it remains activated until their participation in the vehicle pursuit is terminated.
 - b. Officers driving to join or support a vehicle pursuit shall do so in accordance with applicable law and Department directives and training.
 - c. Officers may only participate in a vehicle pursuit utilizing Department vehicles equipped with emergency equipment. [41.2.2, e]
 - d. A marked Department vehicle should be the primary pursuit vehicle.
 - 1) Officers operating unmarked vehicles should relinquish vehicle pursuit duties to officers in marked vehicles as soon as it is practical to do so.
 - 2) Officers operating special-use vehicles should relinquish vehicle pursuit duties to officers in marked or unmarked Department vehicles as soon as it is practical to do so. Officers operating special use vehicles shall comply with the unique pursuit requirements governing their respective vehicles, as established by [Directive Manual 517.02 - Department Vehicles](#).
 - 3) When operationally necessary, officers in vehicles not eligible to participate in a vehicle pursuit may follow a suspect at a safe distance, following all applicable traffic laws, and radio for the assistance of an officer in a vehicle pursuit-eligible vehicle.
6. Pursuit Communications – Officers engaged in a pursuit shall routinely provide updates via the police radio to ECC. Upon initiating a pursuit, officers must immediately communicate to ECC the following information:
- a. The reason for the vehicle pursuit, including the offense a vehicle occupant may be arrested for.
 - b. The officer's location, direction of travel, and a description of the fleeing vehicle.
 - c. How many occupants are in the pursued vehicle, if known, and whether there is any reason to believe they are armed. [41.2.2, c]
- When officers in two or more vehicles are engaged in a vehicle pursuit, the officer behind the lead officer should take responsibility for all radio traffic. The officer who assumes responsibility for radio traffic shall communicate this on the police radio. [41.2.2, d] Officers, other than the officer responsible for radio traffic, should refrain from unnecessary use of the radio. However, any officer may convey important information that is otherwise not being reported.
7. Supervisor Responsibilities - When an officer communicates via police radio that a vehicle pursuit has been initiated, a patrol supervisor shall: [41.2.2, g]
- a. Promptly ascertain the basis for the vehicle pursuit and determine whether the vehicle pursuit complies with applicable law and Department directives.
 - b. For carjacked vehicles, determine the theft date to assess whether to allow the pursuit.
 - c. If the vehicle pursuit is not in compliance with applicable law or Department directives, immediately issue an order via police radio to discontinue the vehicle pursuit.
 - d. Monitor the police radio channel where the vehicle pursuit is being broadcast.
 - e. Ensure a sufficient number of officers are assigned to assist in the pursuit.
 - f. Confirm with ECC that aviation assistance has been requested, as soon as practical.
 - g. Assess opportunities to end the vehicle pursuit using pursuit termination techniques authorized

in this Directive Manual.

The decision to terminate a vehicle pursuit, either by an officer involved in the vehicle pursuit or by order of a supervisor monitoring the vehicle pursuit, shall be communicated via police radio. If a vehicle pursuit is terminated by a supervisor, the officer responsible for radio communications shall acknowledge the order. [41.2.2, h, i]

A supervisor shall respond to the scene of an apprehension following a vehicle pursuit and ensure all appropriate investigative tasks are performed (e.g., evidence processing, arrest activities, BlueTeam, etc.).

8. Jurisdictional Considerations - Officers engaged in a vehicle pursuit who anticipate leaving Arlington County shall notify ECC, who shall contact the jurisdiction the vehicle pursuit is entering. Officers may continue a vehicle pursuit into another jurisdiction regardless of whether the other jurisdiction will provide assistance. [41.2.2, j]
 - a. The Department will transfer primacy of the pursuit to the agency of the jurisdiction entered when the transfer of primary responsibility can be made without jeopardizing the success of the vehicle pursuit and the safety of the public and the police or when Department units have been advised by police radio or otherwise recognize that their assistance is no longer needed. The officers engaged in the pursuit must:
 - 1) Maneuver themselves in a position that allows the other agency to take primacy in the pursuit.
 - 2) Notify ECC of the transfer in primacy.
 - 3) The supervisor overseeing the vehicle pursuit shall designate unit(s) to continue in the vehicle pursuit with the other agency. After this occurs, all non-supervisory Department units who were not designated to continue must discontinue their involvement in the vehicle pursuit. However, when they discontinue their involvement in the vehicle pursuit, they may still assist with other tasks as assigned by a supervisor. [41.2.2, j]
 - 4) Upon termination of a vehicle pursuit, all involved officers shall deactivate emergency equipment and operate their vehicles in accordance with applicable law and Department Directive Manuals.
 9. Follow-Up - All vehicle pursuits shall be documented in a Case Report. [41.2.2, k]
 - a. All vehicle pursuits, vehicle pursuit termination techniques, and vehicle pursuit prevention techniques will be reviewed by a supervisor in a pursuit review except for the deployment of a stationary tire deflation device where the vehicle does not move and no damage to the vehicle occurs. [41.2.2, k]
 - b. All vehicle pursuit, termination, and prevention technique entries in a pursuit review will be reviewed by The Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR) to assess whether any related policy, training, or equipment issues should be addressed. [41.2.2, k]
 - c. OPR shall perform an annual review of all vehicle pursuits within the past calendar year to assess whether any related policy, training, or equipment issues should be addressed. OPR will ensure that an annual review of the pursuit policy is conducted by all sworn personnel. [41.2.2 l, n]
 - d. If a death or serious bodily injury occurs during the course of a vehicle pursuit, officers shall follow the procedures outlined in [Directive Manual 538.07 – Officer-Involved Action Resulting in Death or Serious Bodily Injury](#).
- B. **Trailing** - Officers shall activate emergency equipment when they begin trailing a vehicle and ensure it remains activated while trailing.
1. Officers trailing a vehicle shall notify ECC by police radio and provide the following information:
 - a. The reason the officer is trying to stop the vehicle.
 - b. The officer's location, direction of travel, and a description of the vehicle being trailed.
 - c. The number of occupants in the vehicle being trailed, if known, and whether there is reason to believe they are armed.
 2. Officers trailing a vehicle may only continue to trail it outside of Arlington if it meets the criteria for pursuing a vehicle set forth in subsections IV.A.1 or IV.A.4 above.

C. **Following** - Officers following a vehicle, as defined in III.C of this directive, may not use emergency equipment and must follow all traffic laws.

1. Officers may follow a vehicle outside of Arlington with a supervisor's permission.

D. Rolling Roadblocks

1. Rolling Roadblock - A rolling roadblock may be used to stop a vehicle being trailed. A rolling roadblock may not be used to bring a vehicle pursuit to an end and should not be initiated at high speeds. All rolling roadblocks utilized shall be documented in a case report.
 - a. Officers may only conduct a rolling roadblock using Department vehicles and after having received Department-approved training.
 - b. Supervisory approval is required for the deployment of a rolling roadblock. Prior to approving a rolling roadblock, supervisors shall consider the unique risks associated with this maneuver. These risks include:
 - 1) The vehicle being stopped will collide with Department vehicles if the driver attempts to avoid being boxed in and/or fails to reduce the speed of the vehicle.
 - 2) The vulnerability to close-range gunfire that the officers may experience when they move into boxing positions.
 - 3) Uninvolved traffic to the rear of the rolling roadblock will overtake and interfere with or be affected by the rolling roadblock.

E. Vehicle Pursuit Prevention Techniques

1. Stationary Tire Deflation Devices - Officers who have received Department-approved training on the use of stationary tire deflation devices may use such devices to prevent vehicle pursuits. Officers may only use Department-issued stationary tire deflation devices. The use of a Vehicle Pursuit Prevention Technique shall be documented in a case report.
 - a. Stationary tire deflation devices may only be deployed against stationary vehicles with four or more wheels.
 - b. Officers are prohibited from deploying any type of tire deflation device against a moving vehicle.
 - c. At the time of deployment there must be potential for a subject to flee from police; and either
 - 1) The owner/occupant of a vehicle has committed or is wanted for a felony, crime of violence, or crime with a weapon; or
 - 2) The vehicle or license plate indicates a stolen or "felony vehicle" status, or other felony status, in NCIC/VCIN.
 - d. The deployment location allows for subsequent observation of the target vehicle.
 - e. Officers must not deploy stationary tire deflation devices if their deployment poses an extraordinary risk to the personal safety of the officers.
2. Vehicle Immobilization - Officers may conduct a vehicle immobilization when:
 - a. There is potential for a subject to flee from police; and either
 - 1) The owner/occupant of a vehicle has committed or is wanted for a felony, crime of violence, or crime with a weapon; or
 - 2) The vehicle or license plate indicates a stolen or "felony vehicle" status in NCIC/VCIN
 - b. When apprehending suspects in or near a vehicle that is parked, parking, or starting from a parked position, supervisor approval is not required.
 - c. If the vehicle is stopped at stop signs, traffic lights, or otherwise part of moving traffic, supervisor approval is required.
 - 1) All vehicles surrounding the suspect vehicle must be Department vehicles.
 - 2) The suspect vehicle must be stopped or traveling at a very low speed.
 - d. Officers may only conduct vehicle immobilization after having received Department-approved training and in accordance with such training.
 - e. Considerations prior to performing a vehicle immobilization include but are not limited to:
 - 1) Seriousness of the crime.
 - 2) Officer Safety.
 - 3) Number of occupants and whether these occupants can be readily identified as juveniles.

- 4) Presence of uninvolved occupied vehicles in the immediate vicinity of the suspect vehicle.
- 5) Presence of pedestrians.
- 6) Time of day and weather conditions/visibility.
- 7) Characteristics of the area (residential, commercial, school zone, etc.)

F. Vehicle Pursuit Termination Techniques

1. Stationary Roadblock - A stationary roadblock may be used to terminate a vehicle pursuit under extreme conditions. However, stationary roadblocks are inherently dangerous, and extreme caution shall be exercised when deploying such roadblocks.
 - a. Only the Watch Commander has the authority to approve the deployment of a stationary roadblock.
 - b. A stationary roadblock must be placed in a highly visible location that can be seen from a distance and provides approaching drivers with adequate warning and ample stopping distance.
 - c. At least one Department vehicle with its emergency lights fully activated must be positioned prominently in the roadblock.
 - d. All vehicles used in the roadblock must be unoccupied.
 - e. The use of non-Department vehicles in a stationary roadblock is generally discouraged and should only occur in the most extreme cases. If a non-Department vehicle is used in a stationary roadblock, only an officer may move the vehicle into position. Only officers shall be permitted to be involved in any aspect of implementing a stationary roadblock.

G. Ramming, Bumping, and Other Intentional Impact Maneuvers

1. The intentional ramming or bumping of a pursued vehicle by a moving Department vehicle is an extreme course of action reserved for life-threatening situations. Such action is appropriate only when the dangers posed by the vehicle pursuit to officers and/or the general public are so dangerous that the vehicle pursuit must be ended quickly, even at the risk of causing an accident.
2. To the extent that it is feasible and practical, if a decision to ram or bump a pursued vehicle is made, officers shall select a location where the risk of injury to bystanders, as well as to the officers and pursued vehicle's occupants, will be minimized.
3. The initiation of intentional contact between a moving Department vehicle and a pursued vehicle may subsequently be interpreted as a use of deadly force and therefore subject to [Directive Manual 538.04 - Use of Force](#).