



# Charleston County Sheriff's Office Policy and Procedures Manual

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Sheriff Carl Ritchie

## 2-14 Vehicle Operations

- NEW
- REVISED
- REVIEWED

ACA Standards Reference:

CALEA Standards Reference: 4.2.3, 35.1.9, 41.2.1, 41.3.3, 41.3.4

NCCHC Standards Reference:

SCLEA Standards Reference:

SC Minimum Standards:

*This policy dated 1/28/2025 replaces prior policies cited above and supersedes all previously issued directives.*

I. Purpose:

To establish procedures governing the safe operation of agency assigned vehicles.

II. Policy:

Personnel operating vehicles issued by the Charleston County Sheriff's Office are responsible for the operation, maintenance, and appearance of those vehicles. Personnel operating agency assigned vehicles will exercise due regard for the safety of all persons and demonstrate exemplary driving behavior.

III. Definitions:

A. For purposes of this procedure, the word "deputy" applies to all agency employees with a certification classification of Class I, Class II, or Class III, or Reserve Deputy, as defined by the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy.

The following terms are used interchangeably; however, they carry guidance to specific employees based on usage of the term:

1. Deputy, deputy sheriff, detention deputy, sworn employee, uniformed sworn employee, sworn administrative employee, etc., and
2. civilian, non-sworn employee.

B. *Employee:* When used without further clarification, the term employee is inclusive of all agency members (sworn and non-sworn).

IV. Procedure:

A. No employee of the Charleston County Sheriff's Office will be authorized to operate a Sheriff's Office vehicle without a valid South Carolina driver's license.

B. Only authorized personnel are permitted to operate Sheriff's Office vehicles.

C. Sheriff's Office personnel must review and abide by the Charleston County Vehicle Collision Review Board (VCRB) policy, as outlined in paragraphs AA(1-11) infra.

D. All occupants must utilize seatbelts while operating or occupying an agency or Charleston County government vehicle. (Ref: CALEA 41.3.3)

- E. While operating an agency vehicle, cellular device conversations shall be kept to a short duration and shall not interfere with the safe operation of the vehicle or the ability to maintain attentiveness to duty. Text messaging and/or emailing while driving is prohibited. This includes reading messages while at any traffic control device. Personnel using cellular devices while operating an agency vehicle shall use good judgment and discretion, constantly keeping in mind employee and public safety.
  
- F. Personnel are responsible for the operation, maintenance, and appearance of their issued vehicle. Personnel will refrain from:
  - 1. making anything other than minor adjustments;
  - 2. altering the body, general design, appearance, or markings of the vehicle to include unauthorized stickers, magnets, license plates; and
  - 3. using fuel, oil, lubricants, or other additives in the vehicle other than approved county standards and/or vehicle owner's manual recommendations.
  
- G. All vehicles will be issued with a Fuel Card, and it is the responsibility of each employee to use it in the prescribed manner.
  - 1. Fuel Cards will only be used for an approved Charleston County Fleet vehicle with a matching Data Number unless authorized by the Fleet Manager.
  - 2. Fuel cards will only be used to obtain 87 Octane gasoline or Diesel Fuel unless authorized by the Fleet Manager. The only exception is for agency motorcycles that require specific fuel.
  - 3. Fuel cards may not be used to fill fuel containers, hand-held gasoline tanks, or any other vessel using a fuel card.
  - 4. Fuel cards are only authorized for use when in uniform and / or dressed in agency attire with the exception of out of county agency approved travel.
  - 5. In the event that a fuel card is lost, or stolen employees must make notification to their supervisor in addition to Logistics Supervisors.
  - 6. Fuel cards are vehicle specific to include spare vehicles. It is the responsibility of each employee to ensure that the fuel card remains

with the respective vehicle corresponding to a Charleston County Data Number.

- H. Employees of the Sheriff's Office are permitted to use assigned vehicles off-duty for any activity consistent with this procedure:
1. During off-duty use, deputy sheriffs will advise the Charleston County Consolidated 9-1-1 Center (911 Center) they are "Code 10." This will signify to the 911 Center that the unit is available for emergency service. The deputy sheriff will also advise when they are no longer "Code 10." However, this requirement will not apply to Command Staff personnel.
  2. Deputy sheriffs utilizing their agency assigned vehicles will carry their badge, identification, portable handheld radio, authorized firearm, handcuffs, and body armor/outer vest. (Ref: CALEA 41.3.4)
  3. Radio contact must be maintained while operating the vehicle. Deputy sheriffs will advise the 911 Center when in proximity of an emergency call.
  4. Employees operating a Sheriff's Office vehicle when in an off-duty status (i.e., Code 10) will wear approved uniforms or civilian clothing that reflects good taste and permits them to respond to situations if required. All clothing items will allow for immediate response, will offer some protection, and present a professional appearance to the general public. Bare feet, flip-flops, non-issued short pants, T-shirts, etc., are not permitted. Passengers, both employees and non-employees, are required to adhere to this paragraph as well.
  5. Civilian personnel may accompany members of the Sheriff's Office when the vehicle is operated off-duty. Employees are responsible for the proper appearance and behavior of all passengers.
  6. Should an emergency call for service be received by a deputy sheriff with civilians as passengers, they will first deposit the passengers at a convenient and safe location and will then respond safely to the call for service.
  7. Employees of the Sheriff's Office are authorized to operate their agency issued vehicle within Charleston County and the adjacent counties that border Charleston County (i.e., Berkeley, Colleton, Dorchester, and Georgetown counties).

8. An employee who resides outside of the geographical boundaries of the adjacent counties of Charleston County will park their assigned vehicle in an approved secure location closest to the border of the adjacent county. The employee will submit a memorandum, through their chain of command, advising where the assigned vehicle will be parked at the end of their tour of duty. Secure areas may include, but are not limited to fire departments, police departments, police stations or substations, and other government facilities. This location must be approved by the person in charge of the secured location and the employee's chain of command. Written notification of the vehicle's location must be provided to Logistics.
  9. Employees may be authorized to operate their agency issued vehicle outside of the adjacent counties of Charleston County for training and other approved purposes.
- I. Sheriff's Office Ride-Along Program:
1. The Ride-Along Program permits citizens, civilian employees, and spouses of sworn personnel to ride on patrol.
  2. Participants must be at least 14 years of age. Persons under the age of 18 must have the *Ride-Along Request (CCSO form-148)* signed by a parent or legal guardian.
  3. All *Ride-Along Requests* must be filled out completely and a records check conducted and stamped by the Records Section verifying completion prior to the proposed ride, then forwarded to the Patrol Captain.
  4. *Ride-Along Requests* are approved/disapproved by the Patrol Captain or designee. The Patrol Captain will advise the shift supervisor if an applicant is approved for participation.
  5. It is the responsibility of the Training Unit to schedule and coordinate interns for ride-along participation.
  6. Any supervisor may refuse to allow perspective participants to ride if in their judgment there is a question of propriety. The supervisor may assign riders to specific deputy sheriffs at their discretion. Participants may request permission to ride with specific deputy sheriffs subject to approval of the supervisor.

7. The deputy sheriff is responsible for the safety of the ride-along participant.
  8. When responding to calls for service, the participant will remain in the vehicle.
  9. The deputy sheriff may terminate the ride-along if the participant hampers, interferes or otherwise hinders the deputy sheriff in the performance of their duties.
  10. Tape recorders and cameras may only be utilized with permission of the participating deputy sheriff and the Patrol Captain.
  11. Participants will not be assigned for more than twelve (12) hours in a three-week period unless the Patrol Captain provides permission for individuals involved in approved programs.
  12. Non-sworn agency employees may request permission from the Patrol Captain to participate in the Ride-Along Program during their off-duty hours. A *Ride-Along Waiver* is required. Employees involved in on-the-job training will not be required to complete a *Ride-Along Waiver*.
  13. Certified law enforcement officers from an outside agency may request permission from the Patrol Captain to participate in the Ride-Along Program; however, a *Ride-Along Waiver* will be required. The participant will adhere to their agency's policy and procedures and jurisdictional restrictions as dictated by State law.
  14. *Ride-Along Request* forms will be turned into the Records Section after completion of the ride-along.
- J. Employees of the Sheriff's Office will be cognizant of parking regulations at all times and will not park in restricted or handicapped areas or reserved parking spaces. Employees will not park their vehicles in the visitor parking lot located at the entrance of the Law Enforcement Center (LEC), where the Officer of the Day (OD) is located. This is to ensure visitors will have ample place to park and they can make reports with the OD, visit Human Resources, apply for permits, etc.
- K. When an employee leaves a vehicle unattended, the ignition will be turned off, the key removed, all doors locked and any equipment which may be subject to theft secured. Situations which require the engine to be operating such as the use of emergency equipment or the operation of a canine vehicle are exempt from this requirement. Caution must be exercised when a vehicle

is unattended and left running. Deputy sheriffs are required to engage the transmission lock when the vehicle is left running.

- L. Vehicles will not be utilized by employees of the Sheriff's Office intending to consume or having actually consumed alcoholic beverages. Once a supervisor determines an employee has consumed alcoholic beverages, they will remove the employee from the vehicle, secure the vehicle, and take appropriate action.
- M. Employees of the Sheriff's Office may keep assigned vehicles for a period not to exceed fifteen (15) consecutive days while on annual or sick leave. For periods longer than fifteen consecutive days, all personal items will be removed, the vehicle parked in the secure area of the LEC with two keys and/or remote fob provided to Logistics personnel. The Vehicle Fleet Manager will also be notified of this extended absence.
- N. Sheriff's Office personnel on light duty, FMLA, military activation, extended sick leave, administrative leave or suspension will turn in their issued vehicle(s) and two keys, including the remote fob if equipped, to Logistics personnel. The employee responsible for the vehicle(s) will ensure that all personal items and individually issued equipment is removed from the vehicle. Supervisors will secure any mobile video recordings prior to parking the vehicle at Logistics. Additionally, any mechanical or emergency equipment deficiencies will be noted so repairs can be completed. Personnel on any type of leave for ninety (90) calendar days or more may have their vehicle permanently reassigned to another employee. Upon returning to full duty Logistics personnel will issue the proper vehicle for their assignment.
- O. Sheriff's Office vehicles will not be utilized for carrying heavy or excessive loads and will not have objects protruding from the trunk or windows unless required as evidence, found property or related to a call for service.
- P. No member of the Sheriff's Office will transport an animal in the vehicle. Canine Unit and Animal Control transport vehicles that are equipped with transportation devices are exempt from this requirement. Deputies may transport animals, in certain situations, at the discretion of the on-duty supervisor.
- Q. At no time will vehicles be used on hunting or fishing trips. Raw remains will not be carried in the vehicle unless required as evidence, found property or related to a call for service.
- R. The use of tobacco products of any kind is not permitted while operating or as a passenger in a County owned or leased vehicle. The prohibition includes

smokeless tobacco. Additionally, any electronic inhaler which is meant to simulate and substitute tobacco smoke is not authorized.

- S. Window Tinting of Agency-issued Vehicles:
1. Window tint may be placed on an agency issued vehicle but must be in compliance with [South Carolina Code of Laws 1976, as amended, 56-5-5015](#), to include the appropriate percentage of combined light transmission, which is currently no less than twenty-seven percent and nonreflective. In addition, no window tint or film may be installed on the front windshield below the "AS-1" line of the glass. Any tint or film installed above the "AS-1" line on the front windshield must not interfere with the driver's ability to operate the vehicle in a safe manner.
  2. Prior to window tint installation, the employee will complete a memorandum to the attention of the Logistics Vehicle Fleet Manager requesting approval for the installation. After the installation, the employee will then have the applied window tint inspected by the Logistics Vehicle Fleet Manager or Traffic Unit Lieutenant to ensure that the applied material is in compliance with applicable South Carolina state law.
  3. An employee that is issued a vehicle that already has window tint will not have to complete a memo to continue operations with the tint installed.
  4. Although not required, an employee may request to have the prior-installed window tint removed at their expense, unless the Logistics Vehicle Fleet Manager has determined that the tint interferes with safe vehicle operations.
- T. Traffic stops while in civilian attire will be limited to emergencies or hazardous situations. In all cases, the employee will immediately show their identification and clearly announce their rank, name, agency, and reason for the stop.
- U. No other vehicle, item, trailer, etc., may be pushed, towed, or otherwise conveyed with the agency issued vehicle unless that vehicle is appropriately equipped and authorized for such service.
- V. Ordinarily, employees will not be permitted to jump start another vehicle with battery cables unless in an emergency situation approved by the on-duty supervisor. If jump starting another vehicle is approved, the police radio



systems in the unit will be switched off until the jump start is completed. During this period, sworn personnel will utilize the portable handheld radio.

- W. Normal or routine driving will be consistent with the normal flow of traffic, obedience to traffic laws, posted signs/signals, and adherence to commonly understood "rules of the road" and driver courtesy.
  
- X. Responding to Calls for Service:
  - 1. Upon a request for law enforcement service the 911 Center dispatcher receiving the request will obtain sufficient information to enable the responding deputy sheriff to select and utilize the proper response code for that call for service.
  
  - 2. When called, units will respond with their call sign and location. The 911 Center dispatcher will select the unit(s) within the service area closest to the call for service.
  
  - 3. If doubt exists as to the nature or seriousness of the request for service, the call will be presumed as being an emergency call for law enforcement assistance.
  
  - 4. Based on available information, responding units will select the response code required to safely and expeditiously respond to the call for service. If at any time during the response, responding units change the response code, the 911 Center and patrol supervisor will be notified immediately. (Ref: CALEA 41.2.1 items a & b)
  
  - 5. If another unit is closer to a call for service, that unit will notify the 911 Center and assume primary unit responsibilities. This may enhance response times and shorten the distance required to be traveled by responding units.
  
  - 6. Supervisors are responsible for monitoring responses to calls for service. Once a deputy sheriff has advised the 911 Center of the response code, the supervisor will evaluate the information available and will have final authority to upgrade or downgrade the priority status of the response. (Ref: CALEA 41.2.1 item c)
  
  - 7. Response codes for calls for service are classified as Code 1, 2 or 3, depending on the circumstances. These codes are defined as follows:
    - a. Code 1:

Units responding Code 1 will respond to the location without delay by the most direct route, complying with all traffic regulations and will not use emergency warning devices.

b. Code 2:

Units responding Code 2 will respond rapidly to the location of the emergency by the most direct means. Code 2 responses without the use of an audible signal or display of a visual signal are authorized only when the vehicle is being used to:

- i. obtain evidence of a speeding violation;
- ii. respond to a suspected crime in progress when the use of an audible or visual signal or both, could reasonably result in the destruction of evidence or escape of a suspect; or
- iii. surveil another vehicle or its occupants who are suspected of involvement in a crime.

c. Code 3:

Units responding Code 3 as the primary or back-up unit will respond rapidly to the location of the emergency by the most direct means using all emergency warning devices, and with paramount consideration for the safety of the public and the deputy sheriff. (Ref: CALEA 41.2.1 item d)

8. [Section 56-5-760 of the Code of Laws of South Carolina, 1976, as amended](#), addresses the privileges the driver of an authorized emergency vehicle is entitled to exercise when responding to an emergency call or when in the pursuit of an actual or suspected violator of the law. The provisions of this section do not relieve the driver of an emergency vehicle from the duty to drive with due regard for the safety of all persons.
9. As in a vehicular pursuit, deputy sheriffs must evaluate a call for service by balancing the need for police action, or the result of their action, against the need for an immediate response. Risks to be considered include, but are not limited to:
  - a. vehicle and pedestrian traffic;

- b. weather conditions such as rain, fog, sleet and snow;
- c. road conditions such as construction, obstacles or hazards; and
- d. nature of the call for service versus the distance to be traveled by the responding unit.

Note: Deputies involved in a vehicle pursuit will adhere to all provisions as outlined in [Policy 9-04 Vehicular Pursuit](#).

- 10. Many of these factors may be grounds for exercising extraordinary care during a response situation. When traveling from point A to point B, thought must be given regarding the route to be followed. Within the route, many of the risks outlined above may be present. This often requires the responding unit to alter the response route or vehicle operation.
- 11. Units responding to robbery or burglary in progress calls should discontinue the use of the siren before coming within hearing distance and fully comply with all traffic laws.
- 12. Units within viewing distance of an incident location may turn off emergency lights to avoid alerting any suspects of a law enforcement response.
- 13. Upon arrival at a scene, deputy sheriffs will immediately evaluate the situation and determine if additional units are needed or whether other units responding can adjust their response or be canceled.
- 14. Deputy sheriffs are authorized to activate emergency equipment to protect life or render necessary law enforcement service. Examples of such scenarios include, but are not limited to the following:
  - a. At the scene of any incident where the use of emergency lights constitutes a necessary warning for the safety of life such as at the scenes of fires, collisions, disasters, etc.
  - b. As a visual signal to attract the attention of motorists stopped for traffic violations, or to warn motorists of imminent dangers.
  - c. Where, because of location, distance to be traveled, or traffic conditions, the deputy sheriff determines that an emergency

response is essential in order to provide an appropriate response to a call for service.

- d. In response to a law enforcement officer's emergency request for assistance. (Ref: CALEA 41.2.1)

Y. Agency Vehicle Collisions:

1. [Section 56-5-765 of the South Carolina State Code of Laws 1976, as amended](#), states:

- a. When a motor vehicle or motorcycle of a law enforcement agency, except a motor vehicle or motorcycle of the Department of Public Safety, is involved in a traffic collision that: (1) results in an injury or a death, or (2) involves a privately-owned motor vehicle or motorcycle, regardless of whether another motor vehicle or motorcycle is involved, the State Highway Patrol must investigate the collision and must file a report with findings on whether the agency motor vehicle or motorcycle was operated properly within the guidelines of appropriate statutes and regulations.

- b. A law enforcement department or agency must not investigate a traffic collision in which a motor vehicle, a motorcycle, or an employee of that department or agency is involved that: (1) results in an injury or a death, or (2) involves a privately-owned motor vehicle or motorcycle, regardless of whether another motor vehicle or motorcycle is involved.

2. [Section 56-5-1220 \(B\) of the South Carolina State Code of Laws 1976, as amended](#), states:

- a. If a disabled vehicle or a vehicle involved in an accident resulting only in damage to a vehicle is obstructing traffic, the driver of the vehicle shall make every reasonable effort to move any vehicle that is capable of being driven safely off the roadway as defined by [Section 56-5-460](#) so as not to block the flow of traffic. The driver or any other person who has moved a motor vehicle to facilitate the flow of traffic as provided in this subsection before the arrival of a law enforcement officer shall not be considered liable or at fault regarding the cause of the accident solely by reason of moving the vehicle pursuant to this section.

Z. Traffic Unit Notification:

1. The Traffic Unit will be called for any accident or collision involving a Charleston County owned or leased vehicle and a personal vehicle operated by a Charleston County Sheriff's Office employee conducting county business.
2. Vehicle mishaps may be handled by the reporting deputy sheriff with the approval of their supervisor. Examples include a rock hitting the windshield, a tree branch falling on the vehicle or like incidents.
3. Deliberate acts such as vandalism or damage caused by a detainee may be handled by the reporting deputy sheriff with supervisor notification and response.
4. In the event questions exist, supervisors should contact the Traffic Unit on-call supervisor for a final determination.
5. The Traffic Unit deputy sheriff assigned to a collision investigation will be responsible for handling all issues associated with the investigation of the incident, to include putting the complete collision investigation packet together. Responsibilities may include, but are not limited to: assuring completion of necessary paperwork to include any supporting documentation that may be required by Risk Management; making notifications; obtaining insurance information; preparation for and attendance at VCRB meetings, etc.
6. Once the Traffic Unit deputy sheriff has completed the collision investigation packet, they will forward it to the deputy sheriff's first line supervisor. The deputy sheriff's first line supervisor will review the collision investigation packet and determine if any disciplinary action is needed. It will then be forwarded through the employee's chain of command, up to their captain, who will review and once approved forward it to the Office of Professional Standards.
7. In the event that Traffic Unit personnel did not respond to a deputy sheriff, detention deputy, or civilian employee involved collision or mishap, the reporting deputy sheriff's immediate supervisor will be responsible for handling all issues associated with the incident (i.e., completing a collision investigation packet) and forwarding through the vehicle operator's chain of command up to their captain, who will review and once approved, forward it to the Office of Professional Standards.

8. Collisions/mishaps involving death or serious injury, or which may result in criminal charges against the employee, will be forwarded to the Office of Professional Standards who will place the employee on administrative leave pending investigation. (Ref: CALEA 4.2.3)
9. Collisions/mishaps and findings will be captioned in the employee's Chronological Record and personnel file along with any resultant discipline; and entered in compliance with agency [Policy 6-04 Personnel Early Warning System](#).

AA. Logistics Vehicle Fleet Manager Notification:

1. In the event that any vehicle sustains any cosmetic damage or is involved in any vehicle incident that requires reporting, the employee, or their supervisor, will complete the following items:
  - a. The incident will be reported to the Logistics Vehicle Fleet Manager as soon as possible and documented on the applicable End-of-Shift Report.
  - b. The employee, or supervisor, will take the vehicle to the appropriate Fleet Maintenance shop for a damage review.
  - c. The employee, or supervisor, will then follow the directions of the Fleet Maintenance supervisor for follow-up damage repair estimate documentation.
2. Once notified by the Logistics Vehicle Fleet Manager of approval to repair the vehicle, the employee or supervisor will then contact a representative from the authorized repair facility (i.e., Jones Ford Collision Center) and request an appointment for the damage repair.

BB. Vehicle Collision Review Board (VCRB):

1. Every operator of a Sheriff's Office fleet vehicle or special purpose vehicle will adhere to the Charleston County Government Vehicle Collision Review Board (VCRB) policy.
2. Operators of Sheriff's Office fleet vehicles involved in a collision will attend the VCRB unless notified otherwise by the Charleston County Safety and Risk Management Office.

3. Employees cleared from collision liability by the VCRB will not incur further internal agency sanction or inquiry unless the collision is connected to an internal administrative investigation.
4. Employees found liable for chargeable collisions by the VCRB must attend the first available Defensive Driving Course. Supervisors will be responsible for coordinating and schedule this training, with the Charleston County Safety and Risk Management Office, upon notification of adjudicated points against an employee by the VCRB.
5. Employees who lose their county driving privileges and incur internal discipline will have their case handled in a fair and equitable manner that reflects the best interest of the Sheriff's Office and the employee.
6. Employees involved in repeated chargeable collisions will receive appropriate medical screening. For example, a vision checks or medical examination as required as part of a comprehensive review of the collision before the administration of any internal discipline, if applicable.
7. The VCRB utilizes a point system based on disregard of defensive driving (two points) and direct disregard of defensive driving (four points).
8. Any employee that accumulates ten (10) points within a two-year period or six (6) points in a one-year period will have their driving privileges forfeited.
9. Final decision concerning the assignment of points will be determined by the County Administrator based on the recommendation of the VCRB. There will be no right to appeal within the County's Policy and Procedure Manual until such time the employee's position is directly affected by the course of action, such as demotion, suspension, transfer, or termination.
10. Employees found liable for collisions or who lose their County driving privileges may be subject to appropriate progressive discipline, reassignment and or other administrative personnel action up to and including termination as prescribed in Sheriff's Office [Policy 2-11 Agency Rules & Regulations](#) and [Policy 6-02 Disciplinary Procedures](#).
11. Employees who receive internal disciplinary action in regard to vehicle operations/collisions may grieve the action as prescribed in [Policy 6-03 Grievance Procedures](#).