



# **Charleston County Sheriff's Office Policy and Procedures Manual**

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**Sheriff Carl Ritchie**

## **9-04 VEHICULAR PURSUIT**

- ☐ NEW
- ☒ REVISED
- ☒ REVIEWED

ACA Standards Reference:  
CALEA Standards Reference: 4.1.2, 35.1.9, 41.2.2, 41.2.3  
NCCHC Standards Reference:  
SCLEA Standards Reference:  
SC Minimum Standards:

*This policy dated 4/14/2025 replaces prior policies cited above and supersedes all previously issued directives.*

I. Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines to be followed with regard to vehicular pursuits.

II. Policy:

Vehicular pursuit of fleeing suspects presents a danger to the lives of the public, Deputies and suspects involved in the pursuit. It is the mission of this department to protect all persons' lives to the extent possible when enforcing the law. Deputies involved in pursuits are permitted to exceed the speed limit and travel through traffic control devices, but only with due regard for the safety of other persons. Deputies must read and understand the laws of the State of South Carolina that pertain to vehicle pursuits and any questions that arise must be immediately directed to a supervisor. Deputies are reminded that in the security of their patrol cars they may not naturally focus on the risks that their driving and the driving of the offender's car create, but such attention is critical. In addition, it is the responsibility of the department to assist Deputies in the safe performance of their duties. To affect these obligations, it shall be the policy of the Charleston County Sheriff's Office to narrowly regulate vehicular pursuit.

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, 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, 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).

- C. *Vehicular pursuit*: An active attempt by a law enforcement officer in an authorized emergency vehicle to apprehend one or more occupants of another moving motor vehicle, where the driver of the fleeing vehicle is resisting apprehension; pursuant to [§56-5-750 of the Code of Laws of South Carolina, 1976, as amended](#).

Traffic stops or other instances in which agency personnel activate their emergency lights and/or sirens and the driver/operator complies by coming to a stop in a reasonably short distance will not be considered a vehicular pursuit.

- D. *Authorized emergency vehicle:* Any approved agency vehicle equipped with operable emergency equipment (i.e., blue lights and siren) pursuant to [§56-5-4700 of the Code of Laws of South Carolina, 1976, as amended](#).
- E. *Primary unit:* The law enforcement unit that initiates a pursuit or any unit that assumes control of the pursuit.
- F. *Secondary unit:* Any law enforcement vehicle that becomes involved as a backup to the primary unit and follows the primary unit at a safe distance.
- G. *Special purpose vehicles:* Vehicles intended for use during operations that require the benefits afforded by their special characteristics. Their unique characteristics make them more suitable for use other than routine patrolling.
- H. *Stop Stick®:* Vehicle tire deflating devices designed to puncture vehicle tires using sleeved quills causing a rapid deflation of the tire(s) while minimizing loss of vehicle control.

IV. Procedure:

A. Initiation of Pursuit:

1. The decision to initiate pursuit must be based on the pursuing Deputy Sheriff's conclusion that the immediate danger to the Deputy and the public created by the pursuit is less than the immediate or potential danger to the public should the suspect remain at large. Pursuit may be justified if the Deputy Sheriff reasonably believes that the suspect, if allowed to flee, would present a danger to human life, or cause serious injury. (Ref: CALEA 41.2.2 item a)
2. A Deputy Sheriff in an approved authorized emergency vehicle (with audible siren and 360 lighting) may initiate a vehicular pursuit when the suspect exhibits the intention to avoid apprehension by refusing to stop when properly directed to do so.
3. Agency motorcycles may be used for pursuits when weather and related conditions allow. They will disengage when support from other units becomes available.
4. In deciding whether to initiate pursuit, Deputy Sheriffs will take into consideration:
  - a. location of the pursuit;
  - b. time of day and day of the week;
  - c. road, weather, lighting and environmental conditions;

- d. population density, and vehicular and pedestrian traffic;
- e. condition and performance capabilities of the vehicles used in the pursuit in relation to the speeds and other conditions of the pursuit;
- f. condition and driving capabilities of the pursuing Deputy Sheriff (e.g., fatigue, experience, etc.);
- g. the seriousness of the offense;
- h. the availability of other resources (e.g., air support).

(Ref: CALEA 41.2.2 item *b*)

- 5. A Deputy Sheriff will not initiate a pursuit or assume the role of a primary unit or secondary unit when they have a civilian passenger in their vehicle or if a juvenile is determined to be in the vehicle being pursued.

Deputy WILL NOT BECOME INVOLVED in a pursuit if the suspect is known to be a juvenile unless it is known and can be supported that the juvenile will present a danger to human life if allowed to flee.

**B. Pursuit Operations:**

- 1. All emergency vehicle operations will be conducted in strict conformance with applicable state statutes.
- 2. Upon engaging in a pursuit, the pursuing vehicle will activate emergency lights and sirens. The use of emergency lights and siren does not relieve a Deputy Sheriff from the duty or responsibility of driving defensively and with due regard for the safety of other drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians; pursuant to [§56-5-2360 of the Code of Laws of South Carolina, 1976, as amended](#).
- 3. When using emergency equipment, the Deputy Sheriff is requesting the right of way and does not have absolute right of way to indiscriminately disregard traffic lights or stop signs; pursuant to [§56-5-760 of the Code of Laws of South Carolina, 1976, as amended](#).
- 4. Deputy Sheriffs who have audio/video equipment issued or installed in their agency vehicle will activate their equipment upon initiating or responding to assist with a pursuit and will record all activities until the pursuit is terminated, the suspect is apprehended, the Deputy is no longer involved in the pursuit, or all law enforcement action is complete.

5. The Deputy Sheriff initiating a pursuit will, in all cases, notify the Charleston County Consolidated 911 Center (911 Center) of the pursuit and provide the following information:
  - a. description of pursued vehicle, to include number of occupants;
  - b. direction of travel, with periodic advisement of location;
  - c. reason for pursuit;
  - d. weather conditions;
  - e. speed;
  - f. traffic conditions; and
  - g. involvement of a juvenile.
6. Units operating on a non-primary channel (e.g., Traffic, Metro, etc.) who become involved in a pursuit, or emergency situation, will switch to the applicable primary channel (i.e., West or North) as soon as possible. This allows patrol units to respond and provide assistance as needed.

(Ref: CALEA 41.2.2 item c)
7. Once advised of a pursuit, the 911 Center will:
  - a. order the radio cleared except for emergency transmissions;
  - b. advise the on-duty Patrol supervisor and all other units of the pursuit to include any pertinent information provided by the pursuing Deputy Sheriff;
  - c. assist in directing back-up units to strategic locations as ordered by the supervisor;
  - d. alert other law enforcement agencies of the pursuit, to include any pertinent information provided by the pursuing Deputy Sheriff, if the pursuit crosses into a municipality's jurisdiction or goes beyond Charleston County's jurisdictional boundaries;
  - e. establish lines of communication between responding units from different jurisdictions;
  - f. query DMV and NCIC for registration information and/or warrants;

- g. monitor the pursuit until it has been terminated.  
(Ref: CALEA 41.2.2 item *f*)

8. When engaged in pursuit, Deputy Sheriffs will not drive with reckless disregard for the safety of others.
9. Unless circumstances dictate otherwise, a pursuit will consist of no more than two law enforcement vehicles, a primary and a secondary unit, and available agency aerial support. Other personnel may tactically place themselves to assist but will stay clear of the pursuit unless instructed to participate by a supervisor. Any Deputy who directly participates in a pursuit and is not designated as the primary or secondary unit may be subject to disciplinary actions. Supervisors may authorize the use of additional emergency vehicles if the nature of the pursuit is such that additional personnel are needed to ensure the safety of the public or Deputies.
10. The secondary unit, once engaged, will serve as a backup unit, and will assume responsibility for radio communications concerning the status of the pursuit (e.g., location, direction of travel, etc.) thereby allowing the primary unit to focus greater attention to pursuit driving.  
(Ref: CALEA 41.2.2 item *d*)
11. Depending on circumstances, the primary pursuit unit may become the secondary unit or disengage from the pursuit entirely as other units assume either primary and/or secondary unit responsibilities.
12. When Air Support responds to assist with a pursuit, the following will apply:
  - a. The Tactical Flight Officer (TFO) will immediately begin coordinating with ground units.
  - b. Once Air Support is involved in the pursuit, the Air Support personnel may supplement radio transmissions, when possible, to allow the primary and secondary units to focus greater attention on pursuit driving. The TFO will keep the 911 Center and ground units informed on direction of travel, traffic, and roadway conditions ahead of the pursuit and any other tactical information the TFO may be able to obtain while overhead.
  - c. The utilization of Air Support allows for aerial surveillance to monitor the pursuit or become the primary unit to control the pursuit and permit pursuing vehicles to disengage and position themselves tactically in a supportive role.

- d. The Pilot in Command may terminate Air Support's involvement in a pursuit at any time if safety considerations or flight risks become evident.

**C. Supervisory Responsibilities:**

1. When made aware of a vehicular pursuit, an available supervisor will acknowledge that they are monitoring the pursuit, monitoring incoming information, coordinate and direct activities as needed to ensure that proper procedures are used, assert control over the pursuit, and will have the discretion to terminate the pursuit.
2. When authorizing a pursuit to continue, the supervisor's decision must be based on the conclusion that the immediate danger to the Deputy and the public created by the pursuit is less than the immediate or potential danger to the public should the suspect remain at large. Pursuit may be justified if the supervisor monitoring the pursuit reasonably believes that the suspect, if allowed to flee, would present a danger to human life, or cause serious injury (i.e., suspected violent felons).
3. If a supervisor is in a pursuit, another supervisor will acknowledge that they are monitoring incoming information, coordinate and direct activities as needed. If no additional supervisor is available on the channel being utilized, the 911 Center will alert a supervisor operating on another channel to monitor the pursuit.
4. Where possible, a supervisor will respond to the location where a vehicle has been stopped following a pursuit.

(Ref: CALEA 41.2.2 item g)

**D. Pursuit Tactics:**

1. Deputy Sheriffs will not normally follow the pursuit on parallel streets unless authorized by a supervisor or when it is possible to conduct such an operation without unreasonable hazard to other vehicular or pedestrian traffic.
2. When feasible, available patrol units having the most prominent markings and emergency lights will be used to pursue, particularly as the primary unit.  
(Ref: CALEA 41.2.2 item e)
3. During the course of a pursuit, deliberate contact between vehicles or forcing the pursued vehicle into parked cars, ditches, or any other obstacle, roadblock, boxing in, heading off, ramming or driving alongside the pursued vehicle while it is in motion will be prohibited unless the facts and circumstances would warrant the use of deadly force to protect law enforcement or others from an imminent threat of death or serious physical

injury. Reckless or hazardous driving maneuvers will not be duplicated by any pursuing vehicle. (Ref: CALEA 4.1.2 and 41.2.3 item *a & b*)

4. Deputy Sheriffs will not discharge firearms at or from a moving vehicle except when it is necessary to protect themselves or others from what is reasonably believed to be an imminent threat of death or serious physical injury when the suspect is using deadly force by any means. The decision to use firearms on or from a moving vehicle will take into account the location, vehicular and pedestrian traffic, and hazard potential to innocent persons.

E. Use of Tire-deflation Devices:

1. Hollow spike strip tire-deflation devices (e.g., Stop Stick®) may be deployed by assisting units to stop fleeing vehicles as the primary method of terminating a pursuit.
  - a. Only agency authorized and issued tire deflation devices will be used.
  - b. Whenever possible, the supervisor should direct the locations that the tire deflation devices should be deployed.  
(Ref: CALEA 41.2.3 item *d*)
2. Prior to deployment, Deputy Sheriffs should consider:
  - a. the safety of sworn personnel involved;
  - b. the risk of physical injury to the occupants of the fleeing vehicle; and
  - c. the risk to innocent parties (e.g., pedestrians, bystanders, other motorists, etc.) and/or private property.
3. Because Stop Stick® is designed to be used against vehicles with four or more tires only, it will not be deployed against motorcycles, mopeds, or similar two or three-wheeled vehicles.
4. Stop Stick® may be deployed only on paved surfaces.
5. Unless the continued movement of the fleeing vehicle would result in an unusual hazard to others, Stop Stick® should not be deployed against the following vehicles:
  - a. school buses transporting students;



- b. passenger buses transporting passengers; and
  - c. vehicles carrying hazardous loads, fuels, etc.
- 6. In planning where to deploy Stop Stick<sup>®</sup>, consideration should be given to geographic locations which are conducive to minimizing the risk of injury or damage to property.
  - 7. Deputy Sheriffs should exercise extreme care when utilizing Stop Stick<sup>®</sup>. The cord reel should be used to deploy and retrieve the device from a position of relative safety.
  - 8. Radio communication and close coordination will be maintained between pursuing units and personnel deploying Stop Stick<sup>®</sup>. Subsequent to deployment, pursuing units will exercise care when approaching the location of deployment so as not to drive over the devices themselves. Personnel deploying Stop Stick<sup>®</sup> will promptly remove the devices from the roadway once the fleeing vehicle crosses them.  
(Ref: CALEA 41.2.3 items *a* & *b*)
  - 9. Deputy Sheriffs will receive initial training in the use of agency authorized and issued tire deflation devices, during the Deputy's initial training cycle at the Sheriff's Office. The Sheriff's Office Training Unit can assign refresher courses as needed for the safe usage of the issued tire deflation devices.  
(Ref: CALEA 41.2.3 item *c*)

**F. Termination of the Pursuit:**

- 1. The primary pursuing unit will continually re-evaluate and assess the pursuit situation including all of the initiating factors and terminate the pursuit whenever they reasonably believe the risks associated with continuing the pursuit are greater than the public safety benefit or making an immediate apprehension.
- 2. The pursuit may be terminated by the primary unit at any time.
- 3. A supervisor may order the termination of a pursuit at any time.
- 4. A pursuit may be terminated if the suspect's identity has been determined, immediate apprehension is not necessary to protect the public or law enforcement personnel, and apprehension at a later time is feasible.
- 5. If at any time the pursuit is terminated by the primary unit, all other units involved in the pursuit will terminate their involvement immediately.  
(Ref: CALEA 41.2.2 item *i*)

6. The decision to terminate a pursuit will not result in disciplinary action against any employee who determined that it was necessary.
7. Discontinuation of a pursuit requires that the Deputy Sheriff abandon all active attempts to stop and/or follow the suspected vehicle and will exit the roadway at the nearest intersection or parking lot. All mobile video/audio recording equipment will remain operational until the Deputy exits the roadway to properly document the pursuit termination. (Ref: CALEA 41.2.2 item *h*)

G. Inter-jurisdictional Pursuits:

1. The pursuing Deputy Sheriff will notify the 911 Center when it is likely that a pursuit will continue into a concurrent jurisdiction or leave Charleston County. The 911 Center will notify outside agencies to request assistance if the pursuit appears to be headed into their jurisdiction.

Deputy Sheriffs will verify that the outside agency was advised; and must understand that unless that agency's policy permits them to assist with the pursuit, then it is likely they will be unable to provide assistance as a *primary* or *secondary unit* with the pursuit. They may however be capable of assisting in a support role (e.g., Stop Stick®).

2. Deputy Sheriffs will not become involved in outside agency pursuits unless specifically authorized by a supervisor or it is clearly demonstrated that a unit from an outside agency is unable to request assistance or the emergency nature of the situation dictates the need for immediate assistance. When considering an inter-jurisdictional pursuit, the same criteria should be considered as in initiating a pursuit as outlined in paragraph A (4) *supra*.

If assistance is requested by an outside agency, personnel will function as a support unit only (e.g., Stop Stick®). Deputy Sheriffs will not function as a *primary* or *secondary unit* when assisting outside agencies without supervisor approval.

3. When a pursuit enters into Charleston County, this agency's pursuit procedures, specific inter-local agreements, and applicable state law will govern the actions of Deputy Sheriffs.
4. The on-duty supervisor, upon being notified, of an outside agency pursuit entering the jurisdiction of the Charleston County Sheriff's Office (CCSO) will:
  - a. notify the 911 Center of the pursuit;

- b. cooperate with the reasonable and lawful efforts of the initiating agency to stop the fleeing vehicle; and
- c. continuously evaluate the pursuit and terminate CCSO involvement if the danger of continuing outweighs the need to apprehend the suspect.  
(Ref: CALEA 41.2.2 item j)

H. After-Action Reporting:

1. All pursuits in which Deputy Sheriffs are involved will be reported in writing. An *Incident Report* detailing the particulars of the pursuit (i.e., reason for pursuit, route taken, speeds reached, etc.) will be completed by the primary unit prior to securing from their tour of duty with a copy forwarded to the supervisor responsible for monitoring the pursuit. "Vehicle Pursuit" must appear as an "Incident Type" on the *Incident Report*. Original reports will be forwarded to Records through normal protocol. Records will ensure that the computer entry of the *Incident Report* includes all "Incident Types".
2. Assisting units will complete a *Supplemental Report* to the initial report detailing their actions and involvement and turn it in to the supervisor responsible for monitoring the pursuit before securing from their tour of duty. (Ref: CALEA 41.2.2 item k and 41.2.3 item e)
3. Personnel assigned agency vehicles equipped with Mobile Video/Audio Recording (MVAR) devices will follow *Procedure 9-23 Mobile & Body-Worn Video/Audio Recording Equipment* to acquire copies of pursuits for evidentiary value. Supervisors will also follow *Procedure 9-23* for acquiring copies of vehicular pursuits. Personnel issued Body-Worn Video/Audio Recording devices (BWVAR) will follow *Procedure 9-23 Mobile & Body-Worn Video/Audio Recording Equipment* to acquire copies for evidentiary value. Supervisors will follow *Procedure 9-23* to acquire copies as well.
4. The supervisor responsible for monitoring the pursuit will ensure any MVAR or BWVAR recording capturing the pursuit is downloaded to the agency MVAR/BWVAR server prior to securing from their tour of duty.
5. The supervisor will secure onto CD/DVD any video/audio recording capturing the pursuit incident from all involved law enforcement personnel and/or vehicles and submit into evidence.
6. The 911 Center Shift Supervisor will ensure that a copy of the CAD printout of the pursuit is forwarded to the 911 Center Manager prior to securing from their tour of duty.

7. The supervisor responsible for monitoring the pursuit will complete a request to the 911 Center Manager for the CAD report and an audio copy of all radio transmissions that were broadcast regarding the pursuit.
8. The supervisor responsible for monitoring the pursuit will submit copies of all reports received, statements, dispatch, video, and audio recordings including a *Supervisor's Vehicle Pursuit Review/Assessment Form (CCSO Form-206)* through their chain-of-command up to their captain's level by the next duty day or as soon as practical. If the primary unit involved in the pursuit is in a different chain of command, the captain will then forward the pursuit package to the captain of the primary unit who will review and take any action, if needed. Original reports will be forwarded to the Records Section. (Ref: CALEA 41.2.2 item *k* and 41.2.3 item *d*)
9. The supervisor responsible for monitoring the pursuit may take immediate disciplinary action if they observe egregious or unsafe acts committed by any personnel involved in the pursuit.
10. The captain of the primary unit involved in the pursuit will review the pursuit to determine whether:
  - a. agency rules, policy, or procedures were violated;
  - b. the relevant policy was clearly understandable and effective to cover the situation; and
  - c. agency training is currently adequate.
11. Additionally, the captain of the primary unit will ensure that copies of all paperwork will be forwarded to the Office of Professional Standards (OPS) for final review and entry in the OPS Records Management System and as part of the Personnel Early Warning System for inclusion into the Annual Pursuit Analysis Report. (Ref: CALEA 41.2.2 item *k*, 41.2.3 item *e*, and 35.1.9 item *a & d*)
12. The Office of Professional Standards will be responsible for creating an Annual Pursuit Analysis Report. (Ref: CALEA 41.2.2 item *l*)

**I. Training:**

Sworn personnel who drive agency assigned vehicles will be given documented initial training and documented annual review of the agency's pursuit policy, and annual training in safe driving tactics.

(Ref: CALEA 41.2.2 item *m & n*)

J. Accidents:

Any motor vehicle collision that occurs during a vehicle pursuit initiated by the Charleston County Sheriff's Office will be reported to the South Carolina Highway Patrol for investigation.

K. Pursuit Conclusion:

Proper self-discipline and sound professional judgement is the key to a successful conclusion of a pursuit and apprehension of evading suspects. Because of the many circumstances encountered, the pursuing Deputy must recognize and accept the fact that they will not be able to successfully apprehend every motorist that they decide to stop.

When a pursued vehicle stops, Deputies will exercise due caution in approaching the suspect vehicle (e.g., felony car stop). Deputy Sheriffs will approach, contact, and arrest violators following a pursuit in a professional manner. They will maintain their professional composure throughout the entire event and will comply with all applicable rules of conduct, including those regarding the use of force, the safeguarding of rights, and proper prisoner transport.