



Charleston County Sheriff's Office Policy and Procedures Manual

Sheriff Carl Ritchie

13-06 Traffic Collision Investigation

- ☐ NEW
- ☒ REVISED
- ☒ REVIEWED

ACA Standards Reference:
CALEA Standards Reference: 41.2.4, 61.2.1, 61.2.2, 83.2.6
NCCHC Standards Reference:
SCLEA Standards Reference:
SC Minimum Standards:

This policy dated 1/29/2025 replaces prior policies cited above and supersedes all previously issued directives.

I. Purpose:

To establish a general philosophy and overall guidelines for this agency's traffic collision investigation responsibilities; to facilitate emergency medical service response and other assistance to safeguard the lives and well-being of persons involved in a motor vehicle collision; to protect the property of persons involved in or in the vicinity of the collision; to determine the appropriate enforcement action to be taken and obtain evidence to support prosecution if necessary; and to restore the safe and orderly movement of vehicular and pedestrian traffic at the collision scene as soon as possible.

II. Policy:

It is the policy of the Charleston County Sheriff's Office to conduct complete and accurate investigations of traffic collisions, safeguard lives and property at collision scenes, and take appropriate enforcement action when necessary.

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, 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, deputies, 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. Collision Reporting and Investigation:

1. Uniformed deputy sheriffs dispatched to handle a traffic collision, whether on public or private property, shall report and/or investigate the collision in a thorough and professional manner.
2. The South Carolina Collision and Traffic Ticket System (ReportBeam)

Electronic TR-310 form will be used by deputy sheriffs to report traffic collisions resulting in injury to or death of any person, or total apparent property damage of \$1000.00 or more.

3. Minor traffic collisions, not involving personal injury, generally require the reporting of basic information; however, more thorough investigations are expected when the collision involves:
 - a. death or serious injury;
 - b. property damage;
 - c. hit and run;
 - d. impairment due to alcohol and/or drugs;
 - e. hazardous materials; and/or
 - f. occurrences on private property.

4. Submission of Collision Reports:

It is imperative that all collision reports be completed and submitted in ReportBeam prior to the end of the deputy sheriff's shift. Traffic Services supervisory staff will review them for thoroughness and accuracy.

- a. Should a report be incomplete or need additional investigation, it should be submitted with a note attached explaining that the report is incomplete and why. It is the reporting deputy sheriff's responsibility to finish the investigation and report as quickly as possible.
- b. Rejected documents must be corrected and resubmitted within three (3) calendar days. If needed, Traffic Services will provide guidance on proper corrections to questions to the cause for rejection. Failure to correct and resubmit a rejected document without just cause may result in disciplinary action.

(Ref: CALEA 61.2.1)

5. Death or Serious Injury Collisions:

The Coroner, Traffic Enforcement Unit (hereafter Traffic Services), the Sheriff, or designee, along with the Public Information Officer

(PIO) will be notified of all fatality collisions. The accident scene will be photographed, and a diagram prepared. Statements will be taken from surviving occupants and/or other witnesses. In injury collisions, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) will be notified. Should the injury appear life threatening, the scene will be photographed, and Traffic Services notified. In injury collisions it may be necessary to interview occupants/witnesses who were transported to medical facilities or, if incapacitated, the interview may have to be delayed until the victim sufficiently recovers. (Ref: CALEA 41.2.4)

6. Property Damage:

The responding deputy sheriff will investigate the scene and interview all occupants or witnesses. Should the situation warrant, statements and/or photographs will be taken.

7. Hit and Run Collisions:

Hit and run collisions will be followed up by the reporting deputy sheriff. The deputy sheriff will follow-up on pertinent leads in an effort to locate the other party involved. If there is a description of the suspect vehicle the reporting deputy sheriff shall request a BOLO be issued through the Charleston County Consolidated 9-1-1 Center (911 Center). If deemed necessary, a teletype message may be dispatched to other law enforcement agencies. The reporting deputy sheriff will gather any physical evidence that may be present and turn the evidence in to the Forensic Services Unit (FSU) before the end of their shift. The initial report will also be turned in at the end of the deputy sheriff's shift with a photocopy retained by the deputy sheriff for follow up investigative purposes. Hit and run reports completed in one shift will be submitted the same as any other completed collision report. Reports requiring further investigation may be relinquished to the Traffic Services hit and run investigator.

8. Impairment Due to Alcohol and/or Drugs:

A deputy sheriff will investigate the collision scene. Should there be probable cause to believe one or more drivers were driving under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs, the deputy sheriff will arrest the subject(s). Probable cause may be established through the deputy sheriff's observations of the scene, subject(s), and statements made by offender(s), occupants, and witnesses. Once arrested, subjects will be transported to the appropriate facility for breath testing or, if required, blood or urine testing. In felony *Driving Under the Influence*

(DUI) cases, the deputy sheriff will have the scene photographed and will take statements from other occupants and witnesses. If the driver(s) involved in a *DUI* collision is a minor, the arresting deputy sheriff will notify the Alcohol Enforcement Unit of the State Law Enforcement Division (SLED) who will conduct an investigation into how the minor(s) obtained the alcohol.

9. Hazardous Materials:

Deputy sheriff's responding to the scene of a collision involving a hazardous material spill will avoid any contact with the hazardous material. The deputy sheriff investigating the accident will request the fire service and South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) respond to the scene. Deputy Sheriffs responding to the scene will establish a perimeter to prevent persons from coming in contact with hazardous materials or fumes. The on-duty supervisor will be notified of all such collisions. Deputy Sheriffs at the scene of a collision involving a hazardous material spill will follow procedures specified in the [Hazardous Materials Emergency Response Guidebook](#). The scenes of major or life-threatening spills should be safely photographed. (Ref: CALEA 41.2.4)

10. Collisions on Private Property:

A deputy sheriff will respond to collisions occurring on private property and a collision report will be completed as outlined in the provisions of this procedure. Citations can be issued for any traffic violation when the collision occurred in a public parking lot clearly posted as being under the jurisdiction of law enforcement as outlined by §23-1-15 of the South Carolina Code of Laws, 1976, as amended. A citation can only be issued in all other private property collisions (i.e., farm fields, personal acreage, non-posted parking lots, etc.) when probable cause exists and the collision is the result of and/or involves a hit and run, reckless driving, reckless homicide, *DUAC*, *DUI* or a *Felony DUI*. (Ref: CALEA 61.2.1 and 83.2.6)

B. Collision Scene Responses:

1. A deputy sheriff will be dispatched to the scene of a collision involving any of the following:
 - a. death or injury;
 - b. hit and run;

- c. impairment of an operator due to alcohol or drugs;
 - d. damage to public vehicles or property;
 - e. hazardous materials;
 - f. disturbances between principals;
 - g. major traffic congestion as a result of the collision;
 - h. damage to vehicles to the extent towing is required; or
 - i. when specifically requested by citizens involved in the collision to respond.
2. During weather emergencies (i.e., snow, hurricanes, etc.) and when extremely poor road conditions exist, field collision reporting may be suspended by the on-duty supervisor. Non-injury, minor damage collisions which do not involve any of the factors listed in *a* through *i* above need not be investigated by sworn personnel. The PIO should report this information to the media so it can be communicated to the motorist. 911 Center personnel will respond to citizen's requests by informing them of the weather emergency, instructing them to exchange necessary information, and report the collision to their insurance companies and the South Carolina Department of Public Safety (DPS) via the [Self-Reporting Collision Form \(FR-309\)](#) available from any DPS branch office, online, or local law enforcement agency.
(Ref: CALEA 61.2.1)

C. Collision Scene Responsibilities:

- 1. Normally, the deputy sheriff dispatched to handle a reported collision by the 911 Center is the deputy sheriff in charge of the scene and of investigating the collision, unless otherwise relieved by a supervisor or a Traffic Services deputy sheriff assuming investigative responsibility for the collision. (Ref: CALEA 61.2.2 item *a*, and 83.2.6)
- 2. Immediately upon arrival at the scene of a collision, the first responding deputy sheriff will check for any injured parties, provide first aid where practical and within the limits of training and available resources, and request EMS and/or additional support (e.g., fire services, tow truck, etc.) as needed.
(Ref: CALEA 41.2.4 and 61.2.2 item *b & g*)

3. The first deputy sheriff on the scene shall position their patrol unit (cruiser) in such a manner as to provide maximum protection to the collision scene and to persons and property at the scene. Deputy Sheriffs may summon additional assistance to the scene should the situation so dictate. (Ref: CALEA 61.2.2 item e)
4. Once on the collision scene, deputy sheriffs should also check for any hazardous material spills and/or fire hazards; deputy sheriffs should also remain cognizant of the possibility of these situations developing subsequent to arrival. Should the deputy sheriff determine a possible hazardous material incident has occurred; efforts should be made to identify, protect, and isolate the scene. However, deputy sheriffs shall not expose themselves to the material in an effort to identify the substance. In such incidents, the 911 Center will be advised and the proper notifications made. (Ref: CALEA 61.2.2 item c)
5. Once the aforementioned responsibilities are adequately dealt with, the reporting or investigating deputy sheriff should collect all necessary information and complete the report or investigation in an accurate and timely manner. (Ref: CALEA 61.2.2 item d)

D. Follow-up Investigations:

1. Collision investigation is generally the responsibility of the initial reporting deputy sheriff.
2. Traffic Services will assume sole responsibility of investigations and/or follow-up activities for the following types of collisions:
 - a. collisions resulting in fatalities;
 - b. collisions involving life-threatening injuries;
 - c. collisions involving Charleston County owned, rented, or leased vehicles;
 - d. collisions that carry a high potential of liability for the County of Charleston; and
 - e. collisions involving the South Carolina Highway Patrol.
3. Follow-up investigations may include, but are not limited to such activities as:

- a. collecting off-scene data;
 - b. obtaining/recording formal statements from witnesses;
 - c. reconstructing accidents; and
 - d. preparing formal reports to support criminal charges.
- (Ref: CALEA 61.2.1)

E. Victim Property Control:

- 1. The deputy sheriff in charge at the scene of a collision should ensure that property belonging to collision victims is protected from theft or pilferage and, if necessary, is removed to a place of safekeeping if the owner is unable to care for it. Whenever possible, victims should be given the opportunity to secure their valuables.
- 2. When an injured party is removed from the scene of a collision and/or it becomes necessary to tow the injured party's vehicle, all property in the vehicle shall be listed in a vehicle inventory to be completed by a deputy sheriff prior to removal of the vehicle from the scene.
- 3. It may be necessary to remove certain property and turn it over to Forensic Services Unit (FSU) for security. Such items will include, but are not limited to:
 - a. cash;
 - b. firearms/weapons;
 - c. items of significant value which may become an object of theft; and
 - d. items of significant value that may deteriorate due to exposure.
- 4. Victim property control may be also be accomplished by contacting an immediate family member to assume custody of the property. The name, address, phone number, and relationship of this individual to the victim shall be recorded on a *Supplemental Incident Report* for future reference. This should be accomplished at the accident scene whenever possible. Animal Control will take custody of pets that cannot be turned over to a responsible party.

(Ref: CALEA 61.2.2 item f)

F. Collision Classification System:

As previously stated, all motor vehicle collisions that are investigated by the Charleston County Sheriff's Office will be reported using the South Carolina Collision and Traffic Ticket System (ReportBeam) electronic TR-310 form. In completing this form, deputy sheriffs are required to use coding and guidelines set forth in the *South Carolina TR-310 Report Form Instruction Manual*, published by DPS and issued to each deputy sheriff. This will ensure uniformity and comparability of traffic collision statistics reported and/or collected by DPS. (Ref: CALEA 83.2.6)