

Traffic Crash Response and Reporting

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CALEA 6th Edition Standard: 61.2.1; 61.2.2

502 TRAFFIC CRASH RESPONSE AND REPORTING

502.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy and associated procedures is to:

- Describe preliminary vehicle crash investigation and reporting, to include crashes involving: death or injury, property damage, leaving the scene/failure to report, impairment due to alcohol or drugs, hazardous materials, on private property, and crashes involving City or other government vehicles.
- Describe CPD response to the scene of any crash involving: death or injury, leaving the scene/failure to report, impairment of an operator due to alcohol or drugs, damage to public property or vehicles, hazardous materials, disturbances between involved parties, major traffic congestion, or damage to vehicles requiring removal by towing.
- Establish crash scene responsibilities for responding officers including procedures for: determining the officer in charge of the scene, identifying and caring for injured persons, identifying and handling fire/hazardous materials/traffic and other hazardous situations, collecting information, and protecting the crash scene, potential evidence and property belonging to the involved parties.
- Describe the circumstances that permit the suspension of investigations due to weather events or snow emergencies and availability of online reporting for certain crashes.
- Establish procedures for crash investigation follow-up activities.

502.2 POLICY

The public safety responsibilities of law enforcement include responding to traffic crashes, providing aid and assistance, documentation of the incident and identification of criminal activity. Information gathered in traffic crash investigations may also serve as data sources about driver, pedestrian, vehicle, roadway controls, or related collision/crash information for special research studies. Traffic crashes within our jurisdiction, including those on private property, will be investigated and documented by officers or Community Service Aids (CSA) to the extent necessary and appropriate as established in this directive. Officers should conduct thorough, on-scene investigations of traffic crashes involving:

- Death;
- Injury;
- Leaving the scene/failure to report;
- Impairment of an operator due to alcohol or drugs;
- Hazardous materials;
- Damage to public vehicles or property;
- Damage to property other than vehicles;
- Disturbances between the involved parties;
- Damage to vehicles to the extent towing is required;
- Vehicles owned by the City of Columbia or other government agency.

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Other emergency situations of a higher priority may provide an exception to these on-scene investigative requirements.

502.3 RESPONSE PROCEDURES

Columbia Police Officers will respond to traffic crashes for which they are dispatched or ones they observe no matter the type and should respond without delay. A traffic crash with reported injuries may include an emergency response if the officer reasonably believes such a response is appropriate.

If an officer observes a crash while en route to a call, the officer should notify Boone County Joint Communications of the observed crash and make a decision to either respond to the crash or continue to the original call based on the totality of all circumstances (nature of observed crash and nature of original call). If the decision is made to respond to the observed crash, the officer shall request the original call be reassigned or placed back into the waiting queue based on the priority of the call.

The responding officer will make the determination on what type of crash investigation and documentation is required based on the guidelines contained in this directive.

502.3.1 INCLEMENT WEATHER/SNOW EMERGENCIES

In the event of serious inclement weather or a snow emergency, vehicle crashes may occur with such frequency that our local resources (police, fire, ambulance, tow companies) become temporarily overwhelmed. Unnecessary travel in these conditions by police and other first responders may compound an already dangerous situation. During such conditions a Watch Commander may decide to temporarily suspend all traffic crash investigations that do not involve injuries, a criminal offense or other emergency situation requiring an immediate response. This temporary suspension of crash investigations is referred to in our agency as "Delayed Accident Reporting". The Watch Commander will notify Boone County Joint Communications (BCJC) of the temporary suspension of crash responses until further notice is given. At this time BCJC will advise people reporting minor crashes, not involving injury, to utilize the online Vehicle Accident Report located on the CPD website.

An Officer who observes a traffic crash, or comes across individuals who were involved in a crash under these conditions should stop and check for injuries and initiate a CAD entry if one has not already been assigned by BCJC. If no injuries are reported the officer should advise the involved operators of the online reporting option or provide them with a Delayed Accident Report form which can be filled out by the involved parties and turned into the CPD lobby at a later date. The officer should assist the involved parties as reasonable, keeping in mind the current conditions and the nature of any pending calls for service.

The Watch Commander should inform the City Communications Department of the initiation of Delayed Accident Reporting and request they disseminate the information to local media and through social media outlets.

502.3.2 RESPONSE CONSIDERATIONS AND SCENE STABILIZATION

An important responsibility of the first responding officer to arrive on scene of a traffic crash is to prevent the situation from becoming more serious. This responsibility becomes more challenging when injuries, hazardous materials, fire, multiple vehicles, and severe weather, among other conditions, are involved.

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Under such conditions, priorities are likely to be dictated by the nature of the circumstances at hand. An officer responding to and upon arrival at a crash scene should consider the following:

1. The most appropriate route to the incident. Respond as an emergency vehicle if appropriate.
2. Proper placement of the emergency vehicle to provide protection for involved parties, officers and the crash scene.
3. Use of emergency vehicle lights, flares and other warning devices to protect everyone at the scene and alert approaching traffic.
4. Immediately assess the scene for injured persons and potential hazards such as fire or hazardous materials.
5. Request additional support necessary to handle the incident (e.g., supervisor, traffic control, medical aid, HAZMAT, ambulance, tow vehicles and airship landing).
6. Provide first aid to any injured parties, if it can be done safely, and obtain medical assistance as necessary.
7. Traffic control and protection of the scene.
8. Any parties involved in a disturbance should be separated and the situation deescalated to stabilize the scene.
9. When appropriate for the circumstances, facilitate removal of vehicles and clearance of the roadway.

502.3.3 NOTIFICATION OF CRASH RECONSTRUCTIONIST

A Crash Reconstructionist for the CPD has received specialized training and is issued specific equipment for the investigation and documentation of major crash scenes. In the event of a serious injury or fatal traffic crash, the Watch Commander or any supervisor shall notify a Crash Reconstructionist of the circumstances of the traffic crash and request they respond to assist. Due to a variety of circumstances, a Watch Commander may direct a Crash Reconstructionist to respond to a crash scene at any time he/she believes is appropriate. In the absence of a Crash Reconstructionist, the Watch Commander or any supervisor may assign an officer to investigate the traffic crash.

502.4 INITIAL/PRELIMINARY CRASH INVESTIGATION PROCEDURE

The original (primary) officer dispatched to a crash will be responsible for conducting the initial/preliminary investigation and is the officer in-charge at the scene unless directed otherwise by a supervisor. Under certain circumstances a CPD Crash Reconstructionist may be called to the scene for additional investigation. Enlisting the assistance of a Crash Reconstructionist does not relieve the primary officer from their responsibility in completing the initial investigation and report.

After scene stabilization is accomplished, investigations of traffic crashes that involve an injury or a vehicle that must be towed from the scene should include, at minimum, the following:

1. Identify and interview all involved parties to include a Department of Revenue check for driving status and warrants;
2. Check vehicle registration status for all involved vehicles;
3. Collect insurance information for all vehicles/operators involved;
4. Identify and interview witnesses;
5. Determine if any crimes/traffic offenses occurred and take appropriate enforcement action;
6. Identify, protect, and collect items of apparent evidentiary value;

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7. Document the incident as necessary (e.g., statements, measurements, photographs, evidence collection and reporting) on appropriate report forms;
8. Collect personal items belonging to crash victims to protect them from theft. If the items cannot be given to a responsible party at the scene, they should be secured at the department for safe keeping until they can be claimed and returned to the owner(s) or other responsible party;
9. When appropriate for the circumstances, facilitate removal of vehicles and clearance of the roadway;
10. Conduct follow-up investigation as required.

502.4.1 MINOR CRASH INVESTIGATION PROCEDURE

Traffic crashes that are minor in nature (e.g. does not involve any type of visible injury, reported injury or vehicle that must be towed from the scene) do not require a traffic crash investigation. The officer or CSA dispatched to the scene should, at a minimum, complete the following tasks:

1. Verify with involved parties that no one is reporting any type of injury due to the crash and all operators are confident they do not require a vehicle to be towed from the scene;
2. Verify the Identity and driving status of all involved operators;
3. Verify that all operators can show current proof of insurance;
4. Verify accurate and up to date registration of all involved vehicles;
5. Facilitate the exchange of information by providing each party involved with a Vehicle Accident Information Form to complete and exchange;
6. Provide all operators involved with the CAD number for the incident;
7. Involved parties wishing to make delayed reports under this criteria may be directed to the online reporting option on the CPD website.

502.4.2 CRASH INVESTIGATIONS INVOLVING CPD VEHICLES

All crashes (roadway, left the roadway, private property and CPD garage) involving a CPD vehicle must be reported to a supervisor immediately or as soon as practicable prior to leaving the scene of the crash unless exigent circumstances exist that would make immediate reporting unreasonable. A shift supervisor or Watch Commander will assume responsibility for the investigation of crashes involving CPD vehicles. The following procedures should be followed:

1. First responding officers on scene, or the involved CPD employee if able, should notify Boone County Joint Communications that a crash has occurred involving a CPD vehicle and request a supervisor to respond to the scene;
2. A responding officer or, if able, the involved CPD vehicle operator should take appropriate measures to identify and give aid to injured persons and stabilize the scene as described in section 502.3.1;
3. A crash investigation, appropriate for the crash circumstances, should be conducted by a shift supervisor. The investigation should be documented with the appropriate report using the following guidelines:
 - a. On roadway or left the roadway – Document using a Crash Report.
 - b. Private property or in CPD garage or other City owned property not on a roadway- Offense/incident report.
 - c. A City Vehicle Accident Report (located on the City of Columbia employee website www.MyColumbiaMo.com) will be completed and forwarded to the appropriate Bureau Commander and Risk Management.

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4. All crashes involving a CPD vehicle will be documented with photographs if vehicle damage and/or physical injury has occurred;
5. All crashes involving a CPD vehicle will require a Blue Team entry.

Each crash involving a CPD vehicle will be reviewed individually and investigated based on the circumstances involved and the history of the operator.

502.4.3 INJURY/ FATALITY TRAFFIC CRASHES INVOLVING POLICE DEPARTMENT EMPLOYEES

When an employee of this department, either on- or off-duty, is involved in a traffic crash within the jurisdiction of the Columbia Police Department and it results in a serious injury or fatality, the Watch Commander shall inform the Operations Bureau Commander who may request the assistance of the MSHP or other outside agency. For the purposes of these sections, the term serious injury is defined as any injury that may result in a fatality.

502.4.4 TRAFFIC CRASHES INVOLVING OTHER CITY EMPLOYEES OR OFFICIALS

The Watch Commander may request assistance from the MSHP or other outside agency for the investigation of any traffic crash within this jurisdiction involving any City official or employee where a serious injury or fatality has occurred.

502.4.5 PROCEDURE FOR TRAFFIC CRASHES INVOLVING GOVERNMENT VEHICLES (NON-CPD)

There may be instances where vehicles of other local law enforcement agencies (MSHP, Boone County Sheriff, and MUPD) with shared jurisdiction are involved in crashes within our jurisdiction. Those agencies may choose to conduct the crash investigation and reporting themselves. We shall assist the involved agency to the extent requested to include a complete crash investigation if necessary.

Other government agencies who do not share jurisdiction within the city limits of Columbia may operate vehicles and be involved in crashes within our jurisdiction. When investigating crashes involving a government vehicle (NOT A CPD VEHICLE) under these circumstances, the following procedures shall be followed:

1. Crash Reports shall be completed when the crash occurred on a roadway or highway (including crashes where a vehicle left the roadway), wherein any damage or injury results;
2. Crashes that occur on private property, under circumstances which would normally not be investigated or documented, will be investigated and documented in an incident report;
3. If one of the vehicles is owned by the City of Columbia, a City Vehicle Accident Report (located on the City of Columbia employee website www.MyColumbiaMo.com) will be completed in addition to the Crash Report or incident report and forwarded to the appropriate City Department head and Risk Management;
4. Photographs of the crash scene, vehicle damage, other property damage and injuries will be taken for documentation and evidentiary purposes for all crashes involving a government vehicle.

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502.4.6 TRAFFIC CRASHES ON PRIVATE PROPERTY

Generally, crash investigations should not be completed for crashes occurring on private property. However, if there is a death, serious injury, driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, a failure to report situation, or crash involving a government vehicle, an incident/offense report will be required. Officers or CSAs responding to a crash on private property should conduct the following:

1. Perform a DOR check of each operator and vehicle registration. This ensures that the information will be included in the CAD entry for the incident;
2. Verify that each party has current proof of insurance for the vehicle;
3. Verify the date, time, and location of the private property crash;
4. Provide all parties with the CAD number for the incident and facilitate the exchange of information;
5. Conduct an appropriate investigation and enforcement action if the incident involves serious injury or death, an operator under the influence of alcohol or drugs, inability to provide current proof of insurance, involves failure to report an accident, or involves a government vehicle.

502.4.7 FOLLOW-UP INVESTIGATION PROCEDURE

Depending on the circumstances of a traffic crash, follow-up investigation may be necessary after the scene has been cleared. Resources devoted to this function should be reasonable, taking into consideration the seriousness of the crash. Follow-up investigation on a crash involving death, serious injury, or extensive damage should be conducted by a crash investigator/reconstructionist. Follow-up investigations may include but are not limited to the following:

- Collecting off-scene data.
- Obtaining and recording formal statements from witnesses.
- Seeking expert and technical assistance.
- Crash reconstruction.
- Preparing reports to support criminal charges.
- Court preparation.

502.5 TRAFFIC CRASH REPORTING PROCEDURES

502.5.1 REPORTING OF CRASHES INVOLVING INJURY OR VEHICLE TOWED FROM THE SCENE

CPD officers and CSAs shall utilize the Missouri Uniform Crash Report (MUCR) form for the reporting of traffic crashes to the Statewide Traffic Accident Records System (STARS) that involve injury or a vehicle requiring a tow vehicle to be removed from the crash scene. The MUCR will be commonly referred to in this policy manual as a "Crash Report". This report may be hand written using the Traffic Crash Report workbook or entered electronically using the Law Enforcement Traffic System (LETS).

A final approved Crash Report, including a diagram of the crash scene, may take several days to complete. Persons involved in a crash should be told that it may be a minimum of ten (10) days before the report is complete and approved.

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502.5.2 LEAVING THE SCENE/FAILURE TO REPORT AN ACCIDENT/CRASH

Hit and run crashes that occur on a roadway or result from a vehicle leaving the roadway are referred to as "Leaving the Scene of an Accident/crash". Hit and run crashes that occur on private property are referred to as "Failure to report an accident". Leaving the scene of an accident/crash will be documented in a Crash Report and also in an offense report and will require a CPD case number in addition to a CAD number. A failure to report an accident will only require documentation in an offense report. All investigative information normally required in a Crash Report, investigative techniques and evidence collected should be documented in these offense reports.

502.5.3 REPORTING PRIVATE PROPERTY CRASHES

Generally, we do not investigate or provide reports for private property crashes. Officers or CSAs who respond to these crashes provide a service of documenting in the CAD entry the identification of operators, and vehicle registrations, verify that proof of insurance was provided and facilitate the exchange of information. Investigations and reports on private property crashes are only required when the crash involves:

- Death or serious injury.
- An operator who is under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Extensive property damage or other criminal activity.
- Failure to report an accident/crash.
- The crash involves a government vehicle.

Officers may issue a summons to operators who fail to provide current proof of insurance.

502.6 MODIFICATIONS TO TRAFFIC CRASH REPORTS

A change or modification of a written report that alters a material fact in the report may be made only by the person who prepared the report, prior to its approval and distribution. A written supplemental report may be made by any authorized employee.

502.7 HIGH-VISIBILITY VESTS

The Department has provided American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Class II high-visibility vests to reduce the danger to employees who may be exposed to hazards presented by passing traffic, construction vehicles and disaster recovery equipment (23 CFR 634.3).

Although intended primarily for use while performing traffic-related assignments, high-visibility vests should be worn at any time increased visibility would improve the safety or efficiency of the employee.

502.7.1 REQUIRED USE

Except when working in a potentially adversarial or confrontational role, such as during vehicle stops, high-visibility vests should be worn at any time it is anticipated that an employee will be exposed to the hazards of approaching traffic or construction and recovery equipment. Examples of when high-visibility vests should be worn include traffic control duties, crash investigations, lane closures and while at disaster scenes, or anytime high visibility is desirable. When emergency conditions preclude the immediate donning of the

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vest, officers should retrieve and wear the vest as soon as conditions reasonably permit. Use of the vests shall also be mandatory when directed by a supervisor.

Vests maintained in the investigation units may be used any time a plainclothes officer might benefit from being readily identified as an officer.

502.7.2 CARE AND STORAGE OF HIGH-VISIBILITY VESTS

High-visibility vests shall be maintained by each officer. Before going into service each employee shall ensure a serviceable high-visibility vest is properly stored in the vehicle.

Additional high-visibility vests will be maintained by the Quarter master for replacement of damaged or unserviceable vests.