

Police Department Policy and Procedure Manual

Chapter 4 — Operations

Section Number: 4-5-9
Section Title: Report Writing Guidelines
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I. Policy

- A. It will be the policy of this Department for employees to prepare a report on any complaint/information which may require future investigation, court action, use by any other government agency, or reports necessary for documentation purposes.

II. Purpose

- A. To establish guidelines for effective, competent police report writing.

III. Procedures

- A. Criminal Investigation Reports (CIRs) will be filed in the following circumstances:

- 1. State mandated.
 - a. Missing Persons, refer to Iowa Code Chapter 694.
 - b. Domestic Abuse.
 - c. Child Abuse/Neglect.
 - d. Hit and run crashes over \$1,500 (also complete a TraCS, see below.)
- 2. City/County Attorney mandated.
 - a. Possible future court action.
 - b. Possible issuance of warrant(s.)
 - c. Hit and run crashes under \$1,500.

3. Department mandated.
 - a. Arrest/Youth custody situations.
 - b. Reports requiring follow-up.
 - c. Crimes committed or alleged to have been committed.
 - d. Reported use of any weapon.
 - e. Impounded vehicle.
 - f. Information adding to, or changing the status of any previously reported incident.
 - g. Citizen requests for documentation (insurance reports.)
 - h. Exposures to contagious diseases.
 - i. Mental commitments.
 - j. Deceased persons.
 - k. Non-reportable crashes (unless the time or trip load would prevent the officer from doing so.)
4. When requested by a superior officer.
5. When no report is filed, it will be the responding/assigned officer's responsibility to justify the reason

B. Reports will meet the following requirements.

1. Factual
 - a. Reports will be a computer-generated record of facts gathered by the employee during his/her investigation.
 - b. Reports will address the basic questions of who, what, where, when, why and how.
2. Clear and concise
 - a. Reports will be prepared in chronological order.
 - b. Sentences will be precise and easily understood.
 - c. Paragraphs will be short and single-spaced.

- d. Reports will be prepared using plain language without the use of “cop talk” or slang, unless quoting someone.
 - e. Narratives will not have abbreviations except for those easily recognizable (i.e. DOB, M/W, F/B.)
 - f. Reports will be completed in upper and lower case letters.
 - g. Refer to a person in the same way throughout the report.
 - h. Refer to yourself in the first person, i.e. “I saw” not “This officer saw”.
3. When an officer responds to an incident where a report is necessary, the officer will not try to dissuade the complainant from filing a report.
4. Complete
 - a. Reports will contain all information available and will substantiate any charges filed.
 - b. Reports will contain the name, address, DOB, employer, and home/work telephone numbers for each person mentioned in the report. If possible, obtain the email address for each person listed.
5. Promptness
 - a. Reports should normally be completed and turned in prior to going off duty. If circumstances exist that do not allow the report to be completed by the end of the normal shift, there are four instances in which overtime will be used to complete the report before ending tour of duty:
 - (a) When an officer makes an arrest.
 - (b) When evidence or property needs to be processed and/or documented in a report.
 - (c) When reports will be needed for immediate follow-up or the incident may be seen as controversial.
 - (d) When the report writer will be “off” during the next scheduled shift and unable to complete the report in a timely manner.
 - b. Officers making off-duty arrests will assure the necessary paperwork is completed for court prior to 0700 hours of the morning following the arrest.

C. Affidavits

1. Introduction: The introduction of a Complaint and Affidavit will consist of the following information: day, date, time, location of the incident, as well as how the officer came into contact with the defendant.
2. Elements: Using individual paragraphs, visually separate each count. These paragraphs will include the probable cause, the necessary elements of the offense and any other information necessary to justify placing each charge.

D. Report narrative shall contain the following information:

1. CIR narrative will consist of limited information about “the date, time, specific location, and immediate facts and circumstances surrounding a crime or incident” (Iowa Code, Chapter 22.7.5) that an officer is either dispatched to or self-initiates. This information is public information and is automatically releasable to the public.
2. An officer’s investigation is to be completed in supplemental report(s.) The chronological listing of the officer’s activities to include approach to and arrival at the scene (when appropriate), the officer’s observations, actions taken, evidence collected, and interviews conducted.
3. Interviews for class “A” or “B” felonies (or when requested by a supervisor or detective) will each be documented on a separate supplement.
4. On all other cases, multiple interviews may be contained in one supplement. These interviews should be visually separated from one another and each interview will begin with the following heading: Interview with (name of involved.)
5. Information that cannot be placed on the CIR face sheet will be placed in the narrative above the introduction. This information includes, but is not limited to suspect information, suspect vehicle information and points of entry and exit.
6. Disposition: The investigating officer’s conclusions and the disposition of the incident, such as arrest made, disposition of the evidence and referrals to other agencies, such as DHS.

E. Reports taken over the telephone

1. In general, police reports should be taken by an officer, in person. However, there are some circumstances when taking a report by telephone is acceptable (reporting person is in another location and would be difficult to return to meet an officer.)

2. When taking a police report by phone, officers are required to collect the same quality of information as is required in any other investigation.
 3. Additional care should be taken to assure the identity of the person making the report.
 4. Phone reports are discouraged for felony crimes and crimes that involve physical violence.
- F. Review. It is the responsibility of all personnel to ensure that police reports are complete and accurate. The submitted reports shall be promptly reviewed by a supervisor before forwarding it to investigations, records administration and/or outside agencies and entities.
1. A supervisor shall:
 - a. Review all submitted reports for accuracy, completeness, and assure proper charges are filed, if applicable. This will include, but not limited to, verification of content specific to the offense is included, that suspects or defendants are fully documented, all crime element and UCR fields are entered as required and that the proper jurisdiction(s) for legal document filings are chosen.
 - b. Supervisors will approve or reject each report.
 - c. Supervisors who reject a report shall identify what corrections are to be made and notify the report author.
 - d. Supervisors who reject a report of an officer not under their supervision shall notify that supervisor of the rejection.
 - e. Supervisors must be mindful of the significance of their review. Supervisors who frequently allow substandard reports to continue through the report intake process will be subject to corrective measures.
 2. Authors of police reports shall:
 - a. Monitor each workday for notification of any rejections and directions.
 - b. Personnel directed to do corrective action shall do so with expectations as if it were an initial report.
 - c. Upon correction, officers shall inform their immediate supervisor the modified report is ready to be reviewed.
 - d. Be mindful how important timely and accurate reports are. Personnel who frequently submit substandard reports will be subject to corrective measures.
 3. Detectives and Record Manager

- a. Upon submission of police reports being approved by a supervisor, it is imperative that errors not recognized or corrected be flagged and its processing halted for further review.
- b. Detectives and records personnel who identify error(s) in a police report shall assess the error(s) and determine if a correction or modification should be done. Errors which are minor may be modified for continuation, those more serious will be returned to the authoring officer's supervisor for corrective measures. If correction(s) needs to be made immediately, and the author's supervisor is not working, the matter will be addressed by the appropriate on-duty supervisor.

G. Traffic and Crimes Software (TraCS) will be filed under the following circumstances:

1. Vehicle crashes or hit and run crashes with injury or damage \$1,500 or above.
2. Any vehicle crashes involving government owned vehicles.
3. Any vehicle crashes involving other City property.
4. Traffic citations and written warnings.
5. Preliminary complaints.
6. Deer tags.

H. Field Notes are an important tool for documenting information and assuring that accurate information is included in the police report. Once the officer's report is completed and approved by a supervisor, this report becomes the official record of the investigation. At that time, officers should destroy their field notes.



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