



GENERAL ORDER

Loudoun County Sheriff's Office

Chapter: Operations

Section: 408.5

Subject: Traffic

Topic: Crash Investigation

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OPR.; 07.07, 07.08, 07.09, 07.10, 07.15

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I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this General Order is to provide guidelines for the investigation of traffic crashes.

II. POLICY

It shall be the policy of the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office to dispatch deputies to crashes involving death or serious injury, hit and run, damage to vehicles or property, disputes between vehicle operators, major traffic problems, suspected DUI activity, and all other reportable situations.

Deputies assigned to investigate motor vehicle crashes will complete all required departmental and state reports following the guidelines set forth in this order.

III. PROCEDURE – EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS CENTER

A. Emergency Communications Center Responsibility

1. When dispatching a law enforcement response to traffic crashes, Emergency Communications Center employees will use the following protocol as a guideline for assigning a unit(s) to a crash:
 - a. First to be dispatched is a patrol unit. If the crash is property damage only, then the crash will be investigated by that patrol unit.
 - b. Second to be dispatched is a member of the Accident Reconstruction Unit or member of the Traffic Safety Unit, if on duty and available. (If the Accident Reconstruction Unit or the Traffic Safety Unit advises that his/her response will be more than 15 minutes, proceed to dispatch Virginia State Police as outlined in "c" below).
 - c. Third to be dispatched is the Virginia State Police (VSP), if they are available. ECC will no longer use SIRS to request VSP crash support. Instead, ECC will use the provided hotline to contact VSP Dispatch Center (PSTOC) and request support. In cases where the hotline rings without being answered in a reasonable time, or no specific Trooper unit can be identified; the crash will be investigated by the responding patrol unit or a member of the Traffic Safety Unit.

- d. Regardless of what type of crash is being dispatched, if not advised by the responding unit of their location and estimated time of arrival (ETA), ECC personnel will request this information via radio from the responding unit.
- B. To optimize Traffic Safety Unit availability, ECC will broadcast crashes over the air for Traffic Safety Units to respond. It is the responsibility of the Traffic Safety Unit to determine if he/she is available and within the 15 minutes response time, and to acknowledge the call for service received from the ECC.
- 1. Under normal circumstances, once a deputy is dispatched or self-initiates a crash, the deputy shall treat the crash like any other call for service and investigate the complaint.
 - 2. If a patrol deputy is dispatched to work a crash and arrives on the scene to find the crash involves the threat of death, or death, then the deputy should notify his/her supervisor to request a Traffic Safety Unit.
 - 3. If a deputy arrives on the scene and VSP is present, the trooper will investigate the crash. The deputy shall offer any assistance before clearing the scene. If VSP is present at a scene when a deputy arrives and the trooper specifically requests that the deputy work the crash, the deputy shall do so.

IV. PROCEDURE – CRASH INVESTIGATION

- A. Crashes Occurring on State-Maintained Roadways
- 1. Upon being notified of a crash, the dispatched unit will advise ECC via radio of their location and their ETA. On arrival, the deputy must take control of the scene by:
 - a. Positioning the Sheriff's Office vehicle in a manner that provides the best protection of the scene and then provide emergency first aid as needed
 - b. Notifying the ECC of the situation and requesting additional traffic support units or medical/fire assistance, as needed
 - c. Ensuring that access is available for other emergency vehicles and positioning flares or cones, as needed
 - d. Maintaining a flow of traffic, if possible, and ensuring that spectators and their vehicles do not interfere with persons or vehicles properly engaged at the scene

- e. Taking valuables into custody for safekeeping, following agency procedures regarding the control and storage of money and valuables recovered at the scene.
2. On-Scene Investigation
- a. Determine the apparent severity of the crash and the proper crash report forms to be completed. Crashes resulting in personal injury/fatality, damage in excess of \$1,500.00 and/or hit and run, provided the aforementioned injury and/or damage estimate meets the requirements of the Virginia Police Crashes Report, shall be documented by completing the standard FR300P form.
 - i. Damage to county property as a result of a motor vehicle crash shall be documented on an FR300P regardless of damage amount (For crashes involving Sheriff's vehicles, refer to General Order 405.1, Operation of Sheriff Vehicles).
 - b. Maintain contact with the operators involved and obtain their operators' licenses and registrations. Operators should remain at the scene until the conclusion of the on-scene investigation, unless they require medical attention. In those instances, the deputy should ascertain where treatment will be administered and have the parties remain at that site until he or she is able to contact the operators to conclude the investigation.
 - c. As soon as possible, record the account of each operator regarding and witnesses about what occurred. Make detailed notes securing sufficient information to properly complete state crashes report forms.
 - d. In any non-reportable crash, the deputy shall investigate the crash and prepare a report if the parties to the crash make such a request. Statements may be taken at the deputy's discretion. The investigating deputy shall obtain sufficient information to be able to effectively testify in any resulting civil litigation. Operators shall be provided necessary information on all parties involved for insurance purposes.
 - e. Record all facts relating to the conditions and physical evidence found at the scene. These should include measurements of tire marks, positions of vehicles and pedestrians, and a record of photographs taken as required for all crashes involving a Sheriff's vehicle or fatalities.
3. Removal of vehicles and debris
- a. As soon as practical within the scope of the investigation, the deputy must provide for the resumption of the orderly flow of traffic.

- i. In conjunction with the Code of Virginia, §46.2-888, as amended, deputies arriving on the scene of a crash shall determine if the vehicle can be driven.
 - ii. If the vehicles are moveable, they should be directed to a safe location, out of the flow of traffic, where the deputy can complete their investigation.
 - iii. If the crash is serious or involves a fatality, neither vehicles nor debris should be moved or removed until the scene has been processed by the investigating deputy.
 - iv. Whenever possible, vehicles involved in the crash should be removed from the scene by the owner or by a wrecker service requested by the owner. If no owner is present or no preference is stated, a wrecker service will be called in conjunction with current agency policies.
 - c. The investigating deputy or Crash Investigation Unit will ensure that wrecker service personnel or the appropriate state or county agency clears crash-related debris from the roadway after the scene has been cleared.
 - d. Fire, Rescue and Emergency Management ("FREM") will be notified in the event of any hazardous material spills and will coordinate any necessary clean-up activities involving such spills.
4. Follow-up Investigations
 - a. Upon leaving the scene of a crash, the investigating deputy should interview injured parties who were transported to the hospital. If the nature of the injuries does not allow an immediate interview, the deputy should ascertain from the attending physician the earliest time such an interview will be possible and conclude this part of the investigation at that time.
 - b. If necessary, canvass the immediate area of the crashes scene to locate witnesses. Conduct a further examination of the vehicles involved and the area. Note conditions of traffic control devices, roadway defects, etc.
5. Conclusion of the Investigation
 - a. The on-scene investigation should determine the principal cause(s) of the crash. The investigating deputy should make note of these conclusions.

- b. If violations of law are found to be present, the deputy must note the same and may issue the appropriate summonses or make an arrest, if warranted.
- c. In fatality cases and/or any cases involving possible felony charges, the deputy must present the results of his/her investigation to the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office for a determination concerning related charges. With the exception of DUI, no criminal charges will be placed before review of the crash investigation by the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office.

6. Reports

- a. It is the responsibility of the investigating deputy to turn in all related reports concerning the crash at the end of his/her shift to include:
 - i. The complete crash investigation report. An incomplete report may only be submitted with supervisory approval. An incomplete report would list only basic crashes information in the event the investigation is still pending. In these rare circumstances, a copy of this incomplete crashes report will be submitted to the Records Section by the end of the deputy's shift. If this occurs, the completed report must be submitted within 72 hours of conclusion of the investigation
 - ii. An IBR report shall be completed for all fatality or felonious investigations
 - iii. Hit and run crashes shall be documented as follows:
 - a. Misdemeanors shall be documented on the FR300P
 - b. Felony's shall be documented on the FR300P and an IBR to allow for more detailed reporting of necessary information
 - c. All arrests related to a hit and run shall be documented on the IBR.
 - iv. Charging documents (warrant, summons, etc.)
 - v. Evidence (photographs, physical evidence, etc.)
 - vi. A detailed report concerning investigative findings for later prosecution when the case involves a felony or fatality-type investigation

- vii. A report of any defects of the roadway or signs and signals which contributed to the crash. These shall be noted on the proper forms, turned into a duty supervisor, and forwarded to the appropriate county or state agency. Defects or hazards that present an immediate danger shall be reported to the ECC, which shall in turn notify the appropriate agency.

B. Crashes Involving Death

1. The deputy dispatched to the scene will take control of the investigation unless otherwise directed by a supervisor.
2. The Criminal Investigations Division, I.D. Section, and Traffic Section supervisor should be notified immediately. In all crashes resulting in death a detective will respond to the scene to assist in the investigation.
3. When a victim has been pronounced dead at the scene by the appropriate medical personnel and has not been transported by ambulance personnel, the body shall be covered and the Medical Examiner notified. In all cases where foul play is suspected, the body shall not be covered.
 - a. The body shall be moved to the Medical Examiner's office, funeral home, or hospital morgue only at the direction of the Medical Examiner.
 - b. The investigating deputy should note the decedent's appearance including clothing and any visible injuries.
 - c. The investigating deputy shall request from the Medical Examiner a copy of laboratory results of testing for alcohol and drugs on all victims of fatal crashes.
 - d. The body of the decedent(s) shall be tagged prior to removal from the scene with all pertinent information for later identification.
 - e. The investigating deputy shall notify, or ensure notification, of the next-of-kin as soon as possible. Such notification, if local, shall not be made by telephone. If the next of kin are located outside of the county, the law enforcement agency in that jurisdiction shall be requested to make such notification.
 - f. Investigating deputies will contact ECC as soon as practicable after a fatal crash and supply required information for them to send a Fatal Crashes Message to the State Police Command Terminal in Richmond. This must be accomplished prior to midnight of the date of the crashes or

as soon as possible thereafter.

- g. Deputies should refrain from requesting vehicle registration or operator's license information via radio in the investigation of a fatality.

C. Hazardous Material or Chemical Spill Crashes

1. The deputy shall attempt to identify, by Department of Transportation placard or through the driver, the type of hazardous material contained in the vehicle involved in the crash.
2. Notify ECC of the situation and request that FREM respond to the scene. Provide as much information as possible regarding the hazardous material or chemical spill.
3. Isolate the crash area from non-essential personnel.
4. Avoid contact with any unidentified liquids or vapors leaking or escaping from the crashes vehicle(s) involved in the crash.

D. Crashes Occurring on Private Property

1. Deputies shall respond to crashes occurring on private property when dispatched in the same manner as when responding to crashes on public roadways.
2. Upon arrival at the scene, the deputy shall eliminate any existing traffic hazards and if necessary, request additional traffic units and fire and/or rescue assistance.
3. Crashes occurring on private property parking lots shall be deemed to be workable if they involve personal injury/fatality, if the deputy's initial investigation indicates obvious reckless driving or hit and run (regardless of injury/damage level), or at the request of the parties involved in the crash. The deputy shall investigate the crash and prepare the applicable report.
4. In those crashes deemed workable, the deputy shall complete the standard VDOT Police Crash Report Form (FR300P).
 - a. The crash form will be forwarded to a supervisor for approval prior to being sent to Records Section.
 - b. Police crash report forms will not be completed if the above criterion is not met. The deputy should ensure that the parties involved exchange the proper information for insurance purposes.
5. Crashes occurring on roadways or highways not maintained by VDOT will only

require a report if they meet the criteria set forth by DMV for a reportable crash, i.e., they involve a personal injury and/or hit and run (regardless of the injury/damage level), or the parties involved in the crashes so request. The deputy shall investigate the crash and prepare the applicable report.

E. Fire Hazards

1. FREM shall be responsible for handling any fire hazard that may be present at the scene of a crash.
2. Should a deputy arrive on the scene of a crash and note a fire hazard present, he/she shall request that FREM be dispatched immediately unless the ECC has already done so.
3. At the time a request for FREM is made, the deputy should advise the ECC of the circumstances involved.