

GENERAL OPERATIONS			1105.01	
		VEHICLE OPERATIONS		
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PURPOSE

The purpose of this standard operating procedure is to provide guidelines for the safe operation of police department vehicles in routine and emergency situations. The proper use of vehicle emergency and safety equipment when responding to emergency and routine calls for service, stopping violators, parking off the roadway, and during any operation of a Punta Gorda Police Department vehicle on or off duty. These directives, along with training programs, will maximize the safety of both the operators and public by minimizing crashes, damage and personal injury.

SCOPE

This procedure shall apply to all Punta Gorda Police Department personnel in the routine and emergency operation of police vehicles.

DISCUSSION

Driving is one of the most hazardous tasks performed by law enforcement officers and non-sworn members of a law enforcement agency. Property damage, injuries (minor and/or serious), and deaths often result when vehicles are operated in a careless manner or when operators are distracted by tasks not associated with safe driving or equipment operations. Operators of motor

vehicles often cause or become the victims of traffic crashes due to poor defensive driving abilities and/or habits.

Police department vehicles will be operated in conformance to law and agency guidelines. Members will drive with due regard for public safety. All sworn members will receive initial training on this policy during the Field Training and Evaluation Program.

DEFINITIONS

1. **Emergency Lights:** Emergency lights include roof-mounted light bars, on-dash or in-grill, red or blue flashing lights, and flashing headlights.
2. **Emergency Mode:** A designated emergency vehicle in motion when responding to a call with both emergency lights and siren on continuously.
3. **Emergency or Police Vehicle:** A unit or vehicle will be deemed an emergency or police vehicle when responding to an emergency call or situations according to this procedure, applicable laws, and [Florida Statute \(FS\) 316.126 – Operation of vehicles and actions of pedestrians on approach of authorized emergency vehicle](#). This includes:
 - a. Any police department marked unit equipped with both emergency lights and siren;
 - b. Unmarked police department unit equipped with both emergency lights and siren; or
 - c. Any other vehicle designated by the Chief of Police and equipped with both emergency lights and siren.
4. **Emergency Situations or Call:** A high priority incident received by the Communications Section that, based on the available information, includes the following:
 - a. Situations involving an immediate and serious danger to a person's life (armed and/or dangerous subject(s), shooting, an officer in trouble, etc.);
 - b. Situations requiring immediate action to prevent serious injury or death (fire, explosions, chemical hazards, etc.);
 - c. Situations involving injuries that require immediate attention (traffic crash, shooting, stabbing, etc.);
 - d. Felonies in progress (e.g. robberies);
 - e. Bank alarms.

5. **Marked Unit:** An authorized law enforcement vehicle equipped with functional emergency lights, sirens, and identified by a conspicuous paint scheme and agency insignia.
6. **Motor Unit:** An authorized police motorcycle equipped with functional emergency lights, sirens, and identified by a conspicuous paint scheme and agency insignia.
7. **Siren:** The siren will include an issued or approved audible device or equipment capable of a continuous monotone, warble, and two-tone warning. A horn will not be used instead of a siren.
8. **Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV):** A multi-purpose vehicle with a high center of gravity (some of which have a propensity for rollover while turning; higher speeds increase the likelihood of such an occurrence). The Ford Interceptor Utility vehicle is not classified as an SUV.
9. **Unmarked Unit:** Any law enforcement vehicle other than a marked unit or motor unit.

PROCEDURE

I. GENERAL

- A. Members are required to consistently display proper driving habits setting examples for all citizens to follow. Members shall promote professionalism and safeguard agency integrity by complying with all traffic rules and statutes when performing non-emergency driving.
- B. All authorized operators shall strictly follow and comply with all traffic statutes and regulations of the State of Florida and of any other state or political subdivision thereof. All vehicle operators shall comply with all internal agency policies relating to the use and operation of said equipment while on or off duty.
- C. When responding to emergencies, officers shall exercise due regard for the safety of others.
- D. Only sworn members may operate a vehicle in an emergency mode.
- E. Only vehicles equipped with emergency lights, a siren, and a mobile radio transceiver may be operated in an emergency mode. Emergency lights and sirens shall only be used for reasonable law enforcement purposes to notify others of the presence of a law enforcement vehicle.
- F. A member will not operate an agency vehicle in an emergency mode unless responding to an emergency call for service, or in pursuit.

- G. Four-way flashers will only be used for reasonable law enforcement purposes and shall not be used while the vehicle is in motion.

II. ROUTINE DRIVING

- A. All members shall exercise good judgment in the utilization of agency vehicles and shall not drive, use, or park vehicles in such a manner or in places that may cause unfavorable comment or reflect negatively upon the Punta Gorda Police Department.
- B. Under normal, non-emergency operating conditions and while responding to routine calls for service, officers operating agency vehicles should not utilize emergency equipment and will strictly adhere to all traffic laws and drive in a safe, courteous and defensive manner.
- C. Members shall respond to routine calls in a manner consistent with the normal traffic flow and shall observe all posted speed limits, traffic control devices and signals.
- D. Members shall ensure that proper driving habits are followed by not reaching for, or using non-essential equipment or articles that may cause the driver to lose concentration.
- E. While driving an agency vehicle, the use of hand held devices is not permissible when the vehicle is in motion in accordance with Florida Statutes.
- F. Members shall take proper steps to ensure that the desired pathways of travel are clear prior to moving the vehicle, and shall continuously check for other vehicles and obstacles.
- G. Members shall ensure that proper speeds and vehicle tactics are maintained in accordance with driver/vehicle limitations and within Florida Statute.

III. EMERGENCY VEHICLE OPERATIONS

- A. Officers are routinely called upon to respond to calls for service that are of an emergency nature. While a quick response to any citizen's need is of the utmost importance, the safety of all of the public, and the officer, must be the guiding factor as officers and supervisors respond to a call.
- B. Officers engaged in an emergency response situation are not relieved from the responsibility of driving with due regard for the safety of all persons, nor shall the provisions of F.S. Sections 316.072 and 316.126 protect members from the consequences of reckless disregard for the safety of others.

- C. Extreme care and caution must be exercised whenever an emergency response is initiated. Emergency vehicle operators are not immune from liability nor are they relieved of responsibility for consequences arising from negligent operation of a vehicle or from reckless disregard for the safety of others.
- D. Police department emergency vehicles operated in an emergency mode will use emergency lights and siren. In daylight hours, flashing headlights (wig-wags) may be used for added visibility.
- E. A member engaged in emergency vehicle operations may:
 - 1. Exceed the speed limit after weighing the risks of danger to life and property, and after considering road, traffic, and weather conditions.
 - 2. Go past a red stop signal or a stop sign, but only after stopping as may be necessary for safe operation. The driver will be sure that cross-traffic flow has yielded in each lane before attempting to cross that lane. However, a police department vehicle will not enter a controlled intersection against the directed flow of traffic, at a speed greater than reasonable;
 - 3. Disregard regulations governing direction or movement, or turning in specified directions after considering or weighing the risks of injury to life or property and ensuring that vehicles are yielding to them before passing or going through an intersection; or
 - 4. Disregard the laws governing the parking of vehicles under ordinary circumstances, except a police department vehicle will not block access to a fire hydrant at a fire scene or in any way obstruct the passage of fire apparatus. Marked police department vehicles should be strategically parked in roadways to protect accident scenes, injured persons, or officers directing traffic. When such use is practical, the emergency lights will be activated. Four-way flashers may also be utilized in such instances.
- F. Police department vehicles being used to transport prisoners or civilians will not engage in emergency response without a supervisor's approval.
- G. Lights, no siren exception: All units responding in an emergency mode will use emergency lights and siren continuously, except lights, without a siren, may be used when responding to a felony in progress when the siren would warn the suspect or endanger the lives of any victim or hostage. Units responding with lights and no siren will continue with extreme caution and safety.

IV. EMERGENCY RUN INITIATION

- A. The authority to initiate emergency operation of an agency vehicle will be at the discretion of the officer, based upon available information and the officer's training and experience. Prior approval by a supervisor is not required.
- B. Specialty vehicles, such as sport utility vehicles, bicycles, and motorcycles, will use a greater degree of caution during exigent or emergency operation, with the operators giving due regard to the limitations of the vehicle being operated as well as surrounding weather, road, and environmental conditions.
- C. Emergency Response Codes: The following codes will be utilized to identify the mode of emergency vehicle response:
 - 1. Code 1 - Normal Operation: The arrival of officer will not affect outcome of the call. Conditions at the scene are stable and the response mode shall consist of routine and normal driving. A Code 1 response requires that an officer obey all traffic laws and refrain from the use of emergency equipment.
 - 2. Code 2 – Exigent Operation: The arrival of officer may affect outcome of the call. Conditions at the scene of the call may or may not be stable. Officers shall respond directly to the scene without delay. The response mode may have to be adjusted to meet a changing situation. When officers are responding to an exigent situation in a Code 2 mode, they will not use excessive speed or other dangerous movements and shall use emergency equipment. Tactical consideration may preclude the use of emergency equipment to allow officers to respond stealthily (shutting off lights and siren a few blocks from the scene) to avoid alerting a suspect to their arrival or location of officers, thus improving officer safety or likelihood of apprehending a suspect. Shutting off lights and/or siren does not alleviate the officer from the responsibility to proceed safely and with due caution.
 - 3. Code 3 – Emergency Operation: Arrival of officer on scene will affect outcome of the call. Conditions at the scene are not stable and an emergency exists. The response mode is emergency operation, Code 3. Code 3 requires the continuous use of emergency lights and siren. Only sworn personnel in an authorized emergency vehicle will drive Code 3. Officers initiating a Code 3 run will announce it on the radio.
- D. Situations in which an emergency run may be authorized include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - 1. Officer needs assistance;
 - 2. Incident involving imminent death or serious injury; and
 - 3. A felony in progress just occurred or a felony suspect is believed to be in the area.

E. The Watch Commander is responsible for monitoring, upgrading, or downgrading, and controlling the number of units responding to an emergency call for service. The supervisor may initiate or countermand an emergency run if necessary. Factors to consider include:

1. Type of emergency;
2. Responding officer's experience;
3. Traffic and weather conditions; and
4. Public safety as opposed to the emergency.

APPROVED



PAMELA R. SMITH, CHIEF OF POLICE

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