TYPE OF ORDER	NUMBER/SERIES	ISSUE DATE	EFFECTIVE DATE
General Order	330.03	12/14/2020	12/20/2020
SUBJECT		**PREVIOUSLY ISSUED DATES**	
Traffic Crash Investigations		3/3/1997, 4/27/2015	
ACCREDITATION		**RE-EVALUATION DATE**	
CALEA Standards: 61.2.1, 61.2.2, 61.2.3, 61.2.4, 61.3.2, 83.2.6 **RIPAC Standards:** 11.7, 16.4		11/19/2020, 11/19/2023	
INDEX		**DISTRIBUTION**	
Traffic		All Personnel	

TRAFFIC CRASH INVESTIGATION

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for the investigation and reporting of motor vehicle crashes, including providing and taking the necessary enforcement action. The Woonsocket Police Department also has specific procedures for investigating crashes involving police department vehicles.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Woonsocket Police Department that officers will carry out traffic crash investigation duties, as necessary and appropriate, consistent with the nature, severity, and other pertinent characteristics of such a crash.

III. DEFINITIONS

Traffic Crash: The unintended collision of a vehicle(s) with a person, object, or another vehicle.

Traffic Crash Investigation: The recording and examination of information identifying and describing people, roads, and vehicles involved; describing the results of the crash in terms of the final position of vehicles, objects, and people. Interpreting available facts in an

attempt to specify the particular combination of factors required to produce that particular crash and possible contributing factors, such as violations of the motor vehicle code.

Accident Reconstruction: The technical analysis of available information to determine the cause and reason a crash occurred.

Traffic Crash Reporting: The collection of basic data needed to identify and classify a traffic crash, its participants, vehicles, time, and location.

Preventable Collision: A preventable collision is considered one where the officer-involved, failed to take reasonable action to prevent a collision or used improper action that caused the collision.

Preventable-Excusable Collision: A Preventable-Excusable Collision is considered a preventable collision but under circumstances that justify the actions of the officer, (e.g. an emergency call for service in which an officer is requesting immediate assistance). This definition in no way exempts officers from using due care as stated in Rhode Island General Law (RIGL) 31-12-9.

Non-Preventable Collision: A collision is determined to be non-preventable when the officer-involved took every reasonable action to avoid the collision or when the officer did not cause the collision.

IV. PROCEDURE

A. Crashes

1. Officers are required to respond to the scene and investigate the report of all traffic crashes that occur within the City's jurisdiction to include crashes involving:

    a. Death or injury;
    b. Property damage;
    c. Hit and run;
    d. Driving while under the influence of alcohol/drugs;
    e. Any crash involving a city-owned vehicle or property, a vehicle or property owned by a federal or state agency;
    f. Hazardous materials;
    g. Confrontations between the operator and occupants;
    h. Major traffic congestion;
    i. Vehicle damage to the extent that it is inoperable or unsafe.

2. Upon receiving a report of a crash, the Communications Center will direct one (1) or more officers to respond to the scene. Should another department with

jurisdiction arrive at the crash scene before the officer's arrival and initiate an investigation, no crash report will be made. The officer will offer assistance to the department investigating the crash.

3. The department will utilize the State of Rhode Island Uniform Crash Report Form for all investigated motor vehicle crashes.
4. Unless extenuating circumstances exist (ex. personal injury, major damage), crashes reported at headquarters after the fact, will not require full investigation but will be documented in a self-reporting crash form.

B. Crashes occurring on private property

1. The department will not normally investigate crashes on private property. The department may document the crash as a matter of record.
2. An officer will conduct an investigation and file a crash report when the department receives a report of a crash on private property and one or more of the following conditions exists: *RI 16.4*

    a. Death or injury;
    b. Serious Damage (in excess of $1,000.00);
    c. Suspected impairment of an operator;
    d. Hazardous materials;
    e. Disturbances between the parties;
    f. Hit and run crashes;
    g. The operator is driving after denial, suspension, or revocation under R.I.G.L. 31-11-18 and 31-11-18.1.

3. If the crash does not meet the above criteria, then the officer will facilitate the exchange of information between the parties.

C. Officers' Responsibilities

1. The first officer who arrives at the scene will assume control; assess the situation and request additional assistance as needed (additional police, fire, tow trucks, etc.).
2. The investigating officer is in charge of the crash scene unless a supervisor designates another officer to take charge.
3. It is the responsibility of this officer to direct the activities of any personnel on the scene and to ensure that all areas of the investigation are properly completed.
4. Identify injured persons, administer first aid, and ensure emergency medical assistance is en route.
5. Identify actual and potential fire or other special hazards by checking for placards, leakage, or spills. Request Fire Department and Environmental Management Agencies (EMA), if necessary.
6. Preserve the scene to the extent possible.
7. Identify witnesses and obtain statements, record crash information.

8. Establish a safe traffic pattern around the scene; remove non-essential persons and isolate, if necessary.
9. Remove involved vehicles and debris from the road.

    a. In minor crashes, operable vehicles will be moved off the roadway immediately.
    b. Vehicles that are inoperable or that cannot be safely operated should be towed following departmental guidelines.
    c. Crashes requiring further investigation, such as the deployment of an accident reconstruction officer, the vehicles will remain in place unless necessary to move them to assist injured persons.

10. Ensure that any property belonging to crash victims is maintained in a safe area where it will be protected from theft and pilferage. Items such as wallets, purses, and other small personal items may accompany the crash victim to the hospital. The items remaining in a towed vehicle will be inventoried according to General Order *#330.06 Vehicle Inventory*.
11. Follow-up investigation as necessary.

D. On-Scene Information Collection

1. Witness Statements: The investigation officer will document statements of the operator(s) and any impartial witnesses. In the event the operator is incapable of making a statement, arrangements will be made to have a formal statement taken later.
2. Crash Report Form: The investigating officer will ensure that the Uniform Crash Report Form is completed per Rhode Island General Law 31-26-16. This form is included in the crash report for the Records Management System (RMS). *RI 16.4*
3. Only with prior approval of the Officer-in-Charge (OIC) may the investigating officer enlist any expert or technical assistance in a crash investigation. This includes the use of accident reconstruction specialists and the Rhode Island State Police (RISP) Commercial Enforcement Unit.
4. Only those types of crash investigations that may require the assistance of an accident reconstruction officer or qualify for the use of outside assistance.

E. Commercial Motor Vehicle Crashes

1. In the event the crash requires the services of an accident reconstruction officer, the department Crash Reconstruction Team will be notified.
2. If deemed appropriate, the OIC may authorize the use of the RISP Commercial Enforcement Unit (CEU). Once apprised of the circumstances of the crash, the notified officer of the CEU may determine if the inspection of the vehicle will be completed on the scene or in the impound area.

F. Enforcement Guidelines

If the investigating officer completes the investigation and determines there is probable cause to believe a violation of the motor vehicle code was committed, then the appropriate violator will be issued a summons. The officer must be able to substantiate the violation with evidence and/or witnesses.

G. Crash Scene Traffic Direction and Control

1. All personnel directing or controlling traffic in the roadway will wear department-issued reflective vests. *RI 11.6(b)*
2. The OIC of the crash scene will ensure that any traffic congestion around the crash area is kept to a minimum. *RI 11.6(f)*
3. Officers will position their cruisers in such a way that any approaching traffic is aware of the scene.
4. If the OIC determines that a roadway or a major portion of a highway needs to be closed, the officer may request the Communications Center advise the State Department of Transportation (DOT) or the local highway department to provide special safety devices, i.e., barricades, arrow boards, etc. The Fire Department will also be advised of any road closing.

H. Crashes/Investigations Involving Hazardous Materials

1. Where hazardous materials are encountered or suspected, the area should be isolated as much as possible and evacuated, if necessary. Obtain appropriate technical assistance and allow only properly trained and equipped personnel to enter the area.

    a. No Smoking;
    b. No use of flares unless approved by the Fire Department; and
    c. A Patrol Supervisor should be dispatched to the scene.

2. When responding to a crash scene involving a vehicle transporting hazardous material, the responding officer will adhere to the following procedures:

    a. Safely identify the hazardous material involved;
    b. Notify headquarters of the spill;
    c. Secure the area;
    d. Control traffic; and
    e. Assist in the evacuation of the immediate area, if required.

3. Dispatch will contact the Fire Department, the City of Woonsocket EMA Director or the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) and if the crash occurred on a state highway, the State DOT.

I. Follow-up Crash Investigation

1. Each officer is responsible for the follow-up traffic crashes assigned to them to the extent of their training and time constraints.
2. When warranted, a follow-up investigation should include obtaining formal supplemental statements from witnesses.
3. From time to time, follow-up investigations may require special skills or technical assistance.
4. When additional expertise is needed or when time and distance constraints would hinder patrol functions, such as investigations outside the city, then the Traffic Division will follow-up. Requests for further investigation will be indicated in the investigating officer's statement and a copy of the report forwarded to the Traffic Division.

J. Accident Reconstruction

1. Officers trained in accident reconstruction will be deployed to investigate crashes involving a fatality or injury where death is probable.

    a. Reconstruction may not be required in crashes where causal factors are obvious and criminal charges are not likely.
    b. The patrol OIC will call the on-call accident reconstruction officer (ARO) along with any other personnel or resources deemed appropriate or necessary.

2. When an ARO responds to a crash scene, they will work under the command of the uniform patrol OIC or the on-scene supervisor.
3. The accident reconstruction team will determine the circumstances that contributed to crashes by employing technology designed to analyze certain evidence using his/her investigative skills.

    a. The BCI detective will photograph and process the crash scene. Also, the BCI detective will document and collect all relevant physical evidence.

K. Accident Reconstructionist and BCI Personnel

1. A list of reconstruction-qualified police officers will be established and made available to the OIC.
2. The Chief of Police or designee will oversee the process of qualification to ensure that an adequate base of knowledge and skill is maintained.

L. Charges Relating to ARO Investigated Crashes

The accident reconstruction officer will be responsible for charging operators as appropriate based upon their investigation.

M. City-Owned Vehicle Crashes

Police Vehicle Crashes:

1. Officers involved in a collision while operating a police vehicle **will immediately** notify the Communications Center of the collision, the location, and injuries if any.
2. The OIC will be notified and respond or designate a supervisor to investigate the crash. ***Crashes involving police vehicles (Woonsocket or other departments) must be investigated by a supervisor.***

    a. If the officer involved is assigned to the Detective Division, a superior officer in the Detective Division shall respond. If the officer is assigned to the Vice Unit, a detective supervisor shall respond to limit exposure to Vice Unit personnel.
    b. If a detective supervisor is not available, the patrol supervisor shall respond to investigate.
    c. Under no circumstances shall the officer involved in the crash be allowed to investigate the crash in which he/she was involved.

3. Police officers involved in crashes will not move the involved vehicle unless:

    a. There is a danger to the lives or safety of the public or the police;
    b. The other vehicle attempts to flee and apprehension is necessary;
    c. Other exigent circumstances;
    d. If the vehicles must be moved, every effort shall be made to document the position of the vehicles before their being moved;
    e. If the vehicles are moved, officers will be required to articulate their reasoning subject to analysis by the Accident Review Board.

4. Supervisors will use the following to determine the course of the investigation:

    a. **Minor damage, no injuries:** Supervisor will investigate the crash and a designated patrol officer shall complete the crash report.
    b. **Minor damage and any minor injuries**: Investigation by supervisor will include relevant photographs of the crash.
    c. **Serious property damage with minor or no injuries**: Investigation by a supervisor with the assistance of an ARO and BCI detective.
    d. **Involving a police pursuit:** Investigation by a supervisor with the assistance of an ARO and BCI detective.
    e. **Crashes in which police vehicles strike each other:** Investigation by a supervisor with the assistance of an ARO and BCI detective.
    f. **Serious injury or death**: The OIC will immediately notify the Chief of Police of the incident via chain-of-command. Supervisors will contact an ARO and a BCI detective to assist with the investigation. (Note: When unsure of the extent of injuries, supervisors should make the notifications above.)

5. Reporting Procedures shall be as follows:

    a. Officers involved in the collision shall complete a witness statement describing the circumstances of the collision
    b. The investigating officer shall complete the crash report and take any additional witness statements.
    c. The investigating supervisor shall complete the Police Vehicle Crash Form. Conclusions and/or recommendations for corrective action will be included in the supervisor's report.
    d. All reports will be reviewed by the OIC and forwarded to the Accident Review Board before of the conclusion the shift.

6. **Out-of-City** crashes will be handled in the same manner; however, the proper jurisdiction will handle the investigation.

    a. The OIC must be notified as soon as possible.
    b. The investigating supervisor should respond to the scene if practical, taking into consideration the distance of the crash scene as well as the severity of the crash.
    c. An incident report will be completed on the crash will be completed by the supervisor.
    d. The involved officer's statement and a copy of the investigating department's crash report will be attached.
    e. No crash report will be done by the Woonsocket Police Department for crashes outside the Woonsocket.

7. Accident Review Board

    a. All police vehicle crashes shall be reviewed by the Accident Review Board which is composed of:

        1) Operations Captain;
        2) Traffic Lieutenant;
        3) Training Lieutenant.

    b. After a thorough review of all reports, statements, etc., the Accident Review Board shall examine all police vehicle crashes to determine if the crash was:

        1) Preventable Collision;
        2) Preventable-Excusable; or
        3) Non-Preventable Collision.

City Vehicle Crashes (non-police):

1. When a City-owned vehicle is involved in a crash, the OIC will be notified.
2. A supervisor will respond, however, a patrol officer will investigate the crash.

Per order,

Thomas F. Oates, III

Chief of Police

Written directives published within DTS are in full force and effect on the referenced dates and have been approved by the Chief of Police