POLICY AND PROCEDURE NO. 675

Motor Vehicle Crashes: Response, Investigation, and Reporting

Massachusetts Police Accreditation Standards:
61.2.1, 61.2.2

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1. PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is to establish procedures for the response to, investigation of, and reporting of motor vehicle crashes by members of the Worcester Police Department. Motor vehicle and pedestrian crashes are a significant cause of death and injury across all age brackets. Accurate and timely crash reporting is critical for citizens involved in crashes, their insurers, and the legal community, and serves as the primary source of data for local and statewide analysis of crash patterns to reduce motor vehicle deaths and injuries.

2. POLICY:

The response to, investigation of, and reporting of motor vehicle crashes is a fundamental duty of police officers and a major component of the Department's public safety mission. It is the policy of the Worcester Police Department that motor vehicle crashes be investigated and documented accurately, thoroughly, and promptly.

3. SCOPE:

This policy applies to all sworn personnel of the Worcester Police Department. Dispatch and call-handling functions are performed by the City of Worcester Department of Emergency Communications; this policy governs only the conduct of Department personnel.

4. DEFINITIONS:

Comprehensive Investigation: An investigation conducted by the Crash Reconstruction Unit that documents and analyzes the crash scene, the vehicles, and the physical evidence to determine the sequence of events, and that results in a report prepared by the Unit.

Crash: A collision involving a motor vehicle in operation and one or more other vehicles, persons, or objects.

5. PROCEDURES:

A. Reporting Requirements

Massachusetts General Law Chapter 90, Section 29 requires that the police department notify the Registrar of Motor Vehicles, within fifteen days, via an Official Crash Report, of the

particulars of every crash where a person is killed or injured or where the damage to property or a vehicle exceeds $1,000.

As a matter of public service, it is the policy of the Worcester Police Department to extend this reporting obligation so that an officer shall respond to, investigate, and prepare and submit an official Crash Report detailing each motor vehicle crash to which the officer is dispatched. If conditions dictate (e.g., a snowstorm with numerous simultaneous reported crashes), a sector sergeant may, on a case-by-case basis, relieve officers of this reporting obligation. MPAC 61.2.1 [b]

All crash reports should be completed by the end of the officer's tour of duty, unless the sector sergeant authorizes an extension for investigative purposes.

B. Investigation and Enforcement

In the course of the investigation, if it is clear that the crash was caused by one or more motorists operating in violation of the laws and ordinances relative to vehicular operation, issuance of a citation is the preferred response. Officers should speak with all parties involved in the crash when feasible. As with all investigations, witness names and their statements should be listed within the report. Officers should also attempt to locate and review any available video of the crash. MPAC 61.2.1 [a]

Investigating officers shall further ensure that an exchange of motorist information is effected by the involved motorists for purposes of operator reporting.

Follow-up investigation beyond the initial report may be conducted where warranted by the circumstances or at the direction of a supervisor. MPAC 61.2.1 [c]

C. Crash Scene Responsibilities

The first officer arriving on scene shall assume responsibility for scene management until relieved by a supervisor or other designated officer. MPAC 61.2.2 [a] [b]

Responding officers shall identify and attend to injured persons and request emergency medical services as needed; identify and mitigate fire hazards; identify and address hazardous materials concerns; protect the crash scene and preserve evidence, in accordance with Policy 410 Handling Evidence and Property; and collect information from involved operators and witnesses. MPAC 61.2.2 [c] [d] [e] [f] [h]

Responding officers should manage traffic congestion resulting from the crash, in accordance with Policy 640 Traffic Enforcement; manage disturbances between involved persons; safeguard property belonging to crash victims; and assess damage to vehicles to determine whether towing is required, in accordance with Policy 605 Towing, Inventory, Impoundment, and Abandoned Vehicles. MPAC 61.2.2 [i] [j] [k] [l]

D. Fatal and Serious Crashes

Where a person is killed, where injuries are so extensive that a death may result, where the damage to property is extensive (e.g., truck-bridge collisions), or where hazardous material carriers are involved, the Crash Reconstruction Unit (CRU) shall be deployed for a comprehensive investigation and subsequent reporting. Such deployment shall be made with the authorization of the respective sector sergeant.

Supervisory notification and scene response for crashes involving serious bodily injury are governed by Policy 444 Response to Calls for Service. Where a crash involves a fatality, medical examiner notification and scene procedures are governed by Policy 535 Deceased Persons.

In any crash involving a fatality or serious injury, the Registrar of Motor Vehicles shall be notified forthwith, as required by MGL Chapter 90, Section 29. Where the Crash Reconstruction Unit has been deployed, the Unit shall make the notification. Where the Unit has not been deployed, the sector sergeant shall ensure that the notification is made.

In cases where the deployment of the Crash Reconstruction Unit is in question and where the crash occurs outside the CRU's normal hours, the sector sergeant should consult with a CRU official.

In the event the CRU is activated and conducts a comprehensive investigation, the primary officer assigned to the crash is relieved of the obligation to prepare and submit the crash report unless specifically requested to do so by an official of the CRU, but shall submit a supplemental report documenting the officer's observations and actions at the scene.

E. Damage to Public Vehicles or Property

When a crash involves damage to public vehicles or property, the investigating officer shall document the damage in the crash report and ensure that the appropriate municipal department is notified. Crashes involving Department vehicles are additionally subject to Policy 610 Accidents Involving Police Department Vehicles, which governs administrative reporting and review. MPAC 61.2.2 [g]

Per:

Paul B. Saucier
Chief of Police

Revisions:

October 16, 2026–

Added Purpose, Scope, and Definitions sections. Added a crash scene responsibilities subsection governing the duties and command role of the first officer arriving on scene and the handling of injured persons, fire hazards, hazardous materials, scene protection, and information collection. Added a subsection addressing damage to public vehicles or property. Added a provision for follow-up investigation where warranted. Added direction to speak with all parties involved in a crash when feasible. Added a requirement that the primary officer assigned to the crash submit a supplemental report when the Crash Reconstruction Unit conducts a comprehensive investigation. Added forthwith notification to the Registrar of Motor Vehicles for any crash involving a fatality or serious injury under MGL Chapter 90, Section 29, assigned to the Crash Reconstruction Unit where the Unit has been deployed and to the sector sergeant where it has not. Replaced the reference to a police supervisor with the sector sergeant. Added a statement that dispatch and call-handling functions are performed by the Department of Emergency Communications. Reformatted to the Department's ADA-compliant policy template.

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