

22.00.140 COLLISION INVESTIGATION (CALEA 61.2.1)

Unless indicated otherwise in this policy, officers will respond and investigate traffic collisions occurring on public roadways within the City and complete a Washington State Traffic Collision Report form when the accident involves:

- ❖ Injury to or death of any person
- ❖ Damage to the property of any one person up to or exceeding the apparent dollar value of the State minimum (RCW 46.52) for a reportable collisions
- ❖ Private property collisions involving any one of the response criteria in the Private Property section below
- ❖ Driver impairment due to alcohol or drugs
- ❖ Hit and run on a public roadway
- ❖ Hit and run on private property with suspect information or serious injury
- ❖ Unusual incidents, such as collisions involving hazardous materials, disturbances between the principals or major traffic congestion as a result.
- ❖ When in the opinion of the on-duty supervisor an investigation should be completed.

General Procedures

If the assigned officer determines, in accordance with this policy, that the collision does not require an investigation, the officer will assist the parties involved in the exchange of information and confirm both driver's driving status.

Late reported collisions (e.g., station reports) will not be investigated except when a death or serious injury is involved or when a supervisor determines an investigation is needed.

The extent of the Department's investigation will be determined by the seriousness and complexity of the collision and as outlined in this policy, and collision investigation guidelines maintained in the Traffic Unit.

Officers will use the State of Washington Police Traffic Collision Report form when completing traffic collision reports. The form is mandatory for all investigations required by this policy and will be completed according to the Instruction Manual for the State of Washington Police Traffic Collision Report.

The Department's collision classification system will conform to RCW Chapter 46 and the current edition of the Manual on Classification of Motor Vehicle Traffic Accidents. Classification information, including the above manual, is maintained by the Traffic Accident Investigation Supervisor.

Officer Response (CALEA 61.2.2 & .3)

The Traffic Unit has the primary responsibility for responding to collision scenes and conducting investigations. When Traffic Officers are not available, and the collision does not warrant the call-out of a Traffic Officer, Patrol Officers will conduct the investigation.

Traffic Officers will respond to all collisions involving:

- ❖ Death or serious injury
- ❖ Possible vehicular assault collisions

- ❖ Hit and run, collisions involving serious personal injury
- ❖ Major traffic congestion resulting from a traffic collision
- ❖ Any collision an on-duty supervisor determines to be beyond the expertise of Patrol personnel

During snow emergencies and other major natural disasters, the on-duty commander may curtail the investigation of non-injury, minor property damage collisions. Employees will inform involved persons to file a citizen accident report at the nearest police station. If possible, the on-duty Commander will inform the media when the suspension of an investigation occurs.

Collision Enforcement Actions (CALEA 61.1.5)

When the investigating officer detects a violation of a traffic law and when there is sufficient information to satisfy the elements of a particular violation, enforcement action should be taken.

With the exception of felony traffic offenses or driving while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, collision enforcement (issuance of a Notice of Infraction or Citation) will occur at the completion of the investigation and not at the collision scene.

Officers should inform persons involved in the collision that enforcement action may occur when the investigation is completed.

Officers may take action for regulatory infractions such as driver and vehicle license violations, but should otherwise restrict enforcement to one primary collision causing violation.

Private Property Collisions

Private property collisions will be investigated only if they involve:

- ❖ Death or possible death
- ❖ Driving While Under the Influence of Alcohol and/or Drugs, or vehicular assault
- ❖ Serious injury to persons involved requiring hospitalization
- ❖ Hit and run with suspect information
- ❖ City vehicle and/or property within the City limits
- ❖ Collisions which originate on a city street and where injury or damage occurs on private property

Officers, will not be routinely called to private property collisions not involving one of the factors listed above, but if officers are at the scene, officers should assist the parties in exchanging information and confirming both drivers' driving status.

Collision Scene Procedures (CALEA 61.2.3)

An important part of the investigation rests with the first officer(s) responding to and arriving at the scene. The responsibilities of the first officer(s) include:

- ❖ Responding to the scene safely, exercising good judgment in doing so and at an appropriate speed

- ❖ Parking the police vehicle in an effort to protect the scene, preserve evidence and protect the public
- ❖ Notifying NORCOM of the type of collision and requesting appropriate assistance
- ❖ Providing emergency medical aid (this is a primary responsibility upon arrival)
- ❖ Preliminary photographing of the collision scene
- ❖ Protecting the scene and gathering any evidence that could easily be destroyed
- ❖ Locating drivers and witnesses
- ❖ Controlling property belonging to collision victims
- ❖ Ascertaining if hazardous materials or other hazardous conditions such as downed electrical wires are present and directing that the proper authorities be called
- ❖ Instructing the involved drivers to move their vehicles from the roadway if this can be done safely and if the position of the vehicle is unimportant to the investigation, or arranging for removal of vehicles damaged to the extent that towing is required. The intent is to restore traffic flow as soon as possible in minor collisions and prevent additional injury/damage

The first officer(s) will remain at the scene and assist the assigned investigator until released by the investigator, on-duty supervisor, or until another police emergency occurs.

Unless otherwise indicated in this policy, the officer assigned by NORCOM will be responsible to conduct the investigation. In most circumstances this will be in the following order of preference:

- ❖ Collision Investigation/Enforcement Officer (Traffic Car)
- ❖ Motorcycle Officer
- ❖ Patrol Officer

The on-duty supervisor will resolve any differences that may arise regarding investigative responsibility.

Information collection for the state form and supplementary reports that may be required, depending upon the seriousness of the collision, include:

- ❖ Interviewing persons involved and witnesses
- ❖ Examining/recording vehicle damage
- ❖ Examining/recording effects of the collision on the roadway
- ❖ Taking measurements, as appropriate
- ❖ Taking photographs, as appropriate
- ❖ Collecting/preserving evidence
- ❖ Ensuring that information is exchanged between the involved parties

The officer at the scene of a collision should ensure that property belonging to accident victims is reasonably protected from theft and is removed to a place of safekeeping if the owner is unable to care for it.

Vehicles will be impounded and inventoried according to existing departmental procedures. Cash, firearms, and items of substantial value may be placed in the police property room for safekeeping.

Traffic Collision Scene Stabilization

Officers will use the patrol vehicle's emergency lights, flares, traffic cones and other appropriate warning devices as necessary to protect the scene, alert approaching motorists or temporarily detour traffic.

Once the scene is cleared of vehicles, and the investigation is completed, officers will ensure that all debris has been removed and will promptly remove flares or other warning devices used to protect the scene and restore the normal traffic flow.

If a street is damaged to the extent it must be closed or traffic must be restricted, the Utilities Department should be contacted to provide barricades, portable stop signs, etc.

Officers are authorized to partially or completely close streets in order to efficiently conduct traffic collision investigations.

Officers responding to the scene must keep the situation from getting worse. This responsibility is greater when special hazards such as medical emergencies, fire and electrical hazards are present.

Injury Collisions

Officers at the scene of an injury collision will provide immediate first aid and call for Fire Department response. Once aid unit personnel have arrived, officers will provide such assistance as they may need until the medical emergency is over.

Fire Hazards

If the collision involves a fire or the potential for fire the Fire Department will be called immediately. Officers should contain the area and protect the public and property from the hazard.

Electrical Hazards

If the collision involves an electrical hazard, such as down power lines or damage to transformers, the officers will isolate the area and advise NORCOM to call Puget Power or other appropriate power company.

An officer's involvement will depend on their level of training and experience. The Department will provide officers with updated information and training to ensure they are able to effectively handle accidents involving special hazards.

Follow-up Investigation (CALEA 61.2.4)

The follow-up investigation is generally the responsibility of the investigating officer.

The Traffic Unit Detective, with the approval of the collision investigation supervisor, may be assigned to assist the investigating officer and/or to conclude the investigation when follow-up includes but is not limited to:

- ❖ Collecting or arranging for the collecting of off-scene data
- ❖ Obtaining/recording formal statements from witnesses
- ❖ Reconstructing collisions

- ❖ Preparing formal reports to support charges arising from the collision

Use of Collision Specialist

The Department has officers trained in the advanced and technical aspects of traffic collisions, as well as collision reconstruction.

Department Collision Specialists may be called to conduct the investigation of the collisions listed in this policy.

Other specialists such as photographers, mechanics, surveyors, etc. may be called to assist as necessary, provided that if additional costs will be incurred, the Collision Investigation Supervisor first approves the request.

Required Collision Investigation Equipment

Patrol and Traffic cars will carry basic collision investigation equipment. Specialized vehicles will carry basic and specialized equipment.

The Collision Investigation Supervisor will maintain a list of required supplies. It will be the responsibility of patrol and traffic supervisors to ensure that vehicles have the necessary equipment.

Media Advisories

Media advisories concerning collisions, road blockages, or other situations having a significant effect on traffic conditions on state highways should be directed to the State Patrol office.

Traffic incidents that only effect local traffic flows, but are going to present a long term problem (more than a few hours), will be the responsibility of the Department. At their discretion, the Patrol or Traffic Supervisor may request that the PIO contact any or all of the local radio stations and relay information concerning major local traffic problems for broadcast.