



Lake Worth Police Department

Policy 7.14 – Vehicle Operation

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Chief of Police

I. POLICY

All members operating department vehicles shall exercise due regard for the safety of all persons. Protection of life is the paramount goal of the department. No task, call, or incident justifies disregard of public safety. Further, the public expects its law-enforcement officers to demonstrate exemplary driving skills. All department members who operate department vehicles will comply with the safe-driving procedures outlined in this policy with particular attention to responding to calls for service or engaging in pursuits. Emergency warning devices shall be used consistent with both legal requirements and the safety of the public and department members.

II. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish procedures governing the operation of police vehicles.

III. DEFINITIONS

A. Emergency driving. Driving in response to a life-threatening or other serious incident (based on available information) that requires emergency equipment. Emergency driving -- with emergency lights and siren activated -- allows an officer to disregard certain traffic regulations, but officers must still drive with due regard for the safety of the officer and others.

B. Emergency equipment. Emergency lights and a siren, whistle, or air horn designed to give intermittent signals automatically. All marked vehicles have distinctive, reflectorized decals for additional visibility. In this order, an authorized emergency vehicle is one that has this emergency equipment installed.

C. Normal or routine driving. Driving that dictates vehicle speed consistent with the normal flow of traffic, obedience to vehicle laws and posted signs, and adherence to commonly understood "rules of the road."

IV. GENERAL PROCEDURES FOR ALL RESPONSES (TBP: 7.15)

A. General

1. All departmental vehicles shall be driven safely and properly in full compliance with all traffic laws and regulations. Department vehicles are conspicuous symbols of authority on the streets and many people observe an officer's actions. Each officer must set an example of good driving behavior and habits.
2. Under certain emergencies as defined below, the Transportation Code authorizes officers to disregard traffic regulations. Both the operator and the department, however, are not released from civil liability for failure to use reasonable care in such operations.

B. Routine operation

1. In case of accident or damage to any department vehicle, the driver shall immediately request the on-duty supervisor to conduct an investigation.
2. Crashes involving members of this department may be investigated by an outside agency if deemed appropriate by the Chief of Police or his/her designee.
3. A department member involved in a crash shall complete a fleet crash report.
4. Drivers shall report any found damage or other non-crash damage to their supervisor immediately and document the damage in an incident report.
5. Vehicles used in routine or general patrol service shall be conspicuously marked except those being used for covert patrol operations.
6. Unmarked cars shall not be used in any pursuit but may be used for patrol.
7. Unmarked cars that are provided with emergency lights and a siren may be used to stop vehicles.
8. Standard lighting equipment on marked vehicles includes hazardous warning lights.
 - a. Hazardous warning lights may be used at any time the department vehicle is parked where other moving vehicles may be endangered.

b. Alley lights and spotlights may be used when the vehicle is stationary or moving at speeds not to exceed 15 miles per hour and shall not be used in a manner that will blind or interfere with the vision of operators of approaching vehicles.

9. Seat belts and shoulder straps shall be worn by the driver and all passengers during vehicle operation. Prisoners shall be strapped in with seat belts whenever possible. (TBP: 7.20)

a. Exception: When approaching an incident scene or a call where the officer believes that a rapid exit from the vehicle may be required, the officer may release his/her seat belt.

10. Any young children transported in a police vehicle will be transported in the manner prescribed by the Transportation Code using infant/child car seats when necessary.

C. Inspection (TBP: 7.24)

1. Before each duty assignment, officers shall check their vehicles for cleanliness, operability, and all required equipment.

2. Officers shall also ensure that vehicles have adequate levels of oil, brake fluid, power steering fluid, and gas. Any deficiencies should be reported to the supervisor.

3. Officers shall check the safety features of the vehicle before assuming duty. The check shall include, but is not limited to, all lights, brakes, siren, horn, and steering.

4. Officers shall also check tires for tread wear and proper inflation.

5. Officers shall examine their vehicles at the beginning and the end of their shifts for damage. Officers shall report any damage immediately to the on-duty supervisor.

6. Officers shall examine their vehicles at the beginning and end of their shifts to search for evidence, contraband, or property discarded by prisoners or others. Rear seats shall be thoroughly checked.

7. Officers who discover a department vehicle in need of repairs shall immediately inform the on-duty supervisor.

8. If, in the opinion of the Chief of Police, vehicle damage resulted from abuse or neglect caused by an officer, disciplinary action may result.
9. No driver shall modify, remove, de-activate, or otherwise tamper with the vehicle safety belts, emission control device, or any part of the vehicle that affects its operation.
10. Officers are responsible for maintaining the cleanliness of the interior and exterior of their assigned vehicle. During periods of inclement weather when department vehicles cannot be washed regularly, the driver must ensure that headlight and taillight lenses are kept clean, insofar as circumstances permit.
11. No officer or employee shall operate any department vehicle that he or she believes is unsafe.

D. Driving rules

1. The driver shall carefully observe the surrounding conditions before turning or backing any vehicle.
2. Considering the vehicle's assignment and the installed equipment needed to ensure prompt response times, a department vehicle shall not be left unattended with the engine running for longer than necessary. Vehicles shall also not be left unlocked when the officer has left it to handle other business.
3. The driver must recognize the variable factors of weather, road surface conditions, road contour, and traffic congestion, all of which directly affect the safe operation of any motor vehicle, and shall govern the operation of the vehicle accordingly.
4. Officers responding to certain crimes-in-progress may discontinue the use of the siren upon approaching the location of the occurrence. While this is allowed by Texas law and this policy, officers shall understand that to do so means that they are no longer operating in a manner that would warn other traffic and should remember that they still have a duty to drive with due regard for other motorists and pedestrians.
5. Emergency driving to the scene of a motor vehicle accident is permissible only when an emergency exists, when specific information indicates that conditions at the scene require an emergency response, or when directed to do so by a supervisor.

6. Upon approaching a controlled intersection or other location where there is possibility of collision because of traffic congestion, the emergency driver shall reduce the speed of the vehicle, stopping completely if necessary, before entering and traversing the intersection. When faced with a red traffic signal or stop sign, the officer shall stop his or her vehicle and ensure by careful observation that the way is clear before proceeding through the intersection.

7. Regardless of the seriousness of the situation to which the officer is responding, and excepting circumstances that are clearly beyond the officer's control, he or she shall be held accountable for the manner in which he or she operates the vehicle.

8. At the scene of a crime, a motor vehicle crash, or other incident, a department vehicle shall be parked in such a manner so as not to create an obstacle or hazard to other traffic, unless necessary for the protection of an incident scene or injured persons. If a traffic hazard exists, the emergency lights shall be used to warn other drivers approaching the location.

9. Operators of department vehicles must bear in mind that the traffic regulation requiring other vehicles to yield the right of way to any emergency vehicle does not relieve emergency vehicle operators from the duty to drive with due regard for the safety of all persons using the highways. Nor does this traffic regulation protect the driver from the consequences of arbitrary use of this right-of-way regulation.

V. PROCEDURES FOR EMERGENCY DRIVING

A. General

1. No fixed rule can apply to every circumstance that may arise governing emergency driving. Although an officer may receive information that leads him/her to respond to a call with emergency lights and siren activated, in the majority of such cases an officer discovers, upon arrival, that an emergency response was not justified.

2. Section 546.005 of the Transportation Code states that the exemptions to driving laws granted to emergency vehicle operators "does not relieve the operator from the duty to drive with appropriate regard for the safety of all persons or the consequences of reckless disregard for the safety of others." Recognizing that protection of human life is paramount, responding officers must remember that their objective is to get to the

location of the occurrence as soon as possible--safely--without danger to themselves or to others.

B. Response codes: Calls for service are classified as Code 1 or Code 3, depending on circumstances. The codes are defined as follows:

1. Code 1 responses are utilized for any situation regardless of apparent urgency where the preservation of life is not a consideration. Units responding to Code 1 calls shall respond to the location without delay, complying with all traffic regulations, and shall not use emergency warning devices.

2. Code 3 responses are authorized for any emergency where the preservation of life is a consideration. Primary and support units responding to Code 3 calls shall proceed rapidly to the location of the emergency by the most direct means, using all emergency warning devices with a paramount consideration for the safety of the public and the assigned officers. Code 3 calls are authorized by a field supervisor, or the patrol officer, subject to the considerations discussed below. Field supervisors shall closely monitor all Code 3 calls and shall respond if necessary.

NOTE: Field supervisors shall monitor the response codes for calls for assistance and shall have the authority to upgrade or downgrade assigned response codes.

C. Dispatcher assignments

1. The dispatcher shall assign a high priority classification to any call that suggests the preservation of life is a consideration. (See B. 2, above)

D. Officer's response to call

1. Upon arrival at the scene of a call, the responding officer shall rapidly evaluate the situation and determine whether additional units are still needed or whether other units responding Code 3 can be slowed or cancelled.

2. All units responding to calls where emergency equipment may cause an unnecessary disruption shall, before coming within hearing distance, discontinue the use of the siren and at that time fully comply with all traffic laws. Before coming within sight of the location, officers shall discontinue the use of the emergency warning lights. Officers are reminded that upon deactivation of a siren and flashing lights, their

response ceases to be an emergency and they must comply with all posted speeds and traffic control devices.

3. In situations requiring a silent response, e.g., alarms and prowler calls, officers shall respond as rapidly as possible, obeying all traffic laws and signs.

4. Officer-initiated response.

a. When, in the opinion of the officer, an emergency is imminent or exists, or that activation of emergency warning devices is necessary to protect life or render the necessary enforcement, the department authorizes an emergency response.

b. Examples include the following:

1. Any incident where the use of emergency lights constitutes a necessary warning for the safety of life (such as scenes of fires, accidents, or disasters).

2. As a visual signal to attract the attention of motorists being stopped for traffic violations, or to warn motorists of imminent dangers.

3. Responding to Code 1 calls, where the officer has previous or additional information.

4. Where because of location, distance to be traveled, or traffic conditions, the officer determines that emergency operating conditions are essential in order to provide an appropriate response.

5. In response to an officer's emergency request for assistance.

6. For pursuit. (See Policy 7.15)

E. Use of emergency warning devices in non-emergencies

1. Officers shall activate emergency equipment to notify drivers that they must stop, and to provide a safe environment for the driver, officer, and the public.

2. Officers may activate emergency equipment in non-emergencies when expediency is required to eliminate a potential hazard to the public or other officers, such as using emergency lights to protect disabled motorists or when department vehicles are used as protective barriers.