



Lake Worth Police Department

Policy 7.31 – Crash Investigations

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Approved By: _____

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I. POLICY

An objective of the department is the reduction of motor vehicle crashes. To accomplish this, the department performs a variety of functions such as providing emergency service to the injured, protecting the crash scene, conducting crash investigations and follow-ups, preparing reports, and taking proper enforcement action.

The purposes of crash investigation are to determine the cause of an automobile crash and to use the information to develop enforcement that will reduce crashes. Crash reports are used by the Department of Public Safety and the Department of Transportation at the state level, and by the city locally to study the frequency of crashes at a given location and time, the causes of crashes, and the road conditions that existed when the crash occurred. The reports are also used to develop selective enforcement programs, to provide engineering studies, and to promote street and highway safety.

II. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for the proper handling of traffic crashes and for the collection and use of data that will reduce automobile crashes resulting in property damage, injury, and death.

III. PROCEDURES – GENERAL (TBP: 7.16)

A. Crash report and investigation, general

1. Texas Transportation Code requirements concerning the reporting of traffic crashes include the following:

- a. TTC 550.026. The driver of any vehicle involved in a crash resulting in death or injury shall immediately notify law-enforcement officials.
- b. TTC 550.062. A law-enforcement officer investigating a crash resulting in injury or death or total property damage to an apparent amount of \$1,000 or more shall make a written report of it to DPS.
- c. Officers who investigate a crash for which a report must be

made, either at the time of and at the scene of the crash, or thereafter and elsewhere, by interviewing participants or witnesses, shall promptly forward a written report of the crash after completing the investigation. (Although TTC 550.062 allows 10 days to complete a crash report, it is the policy of this agency to promptly complete and forward the report as soon as possible.)

2. An officer shall respond to and, if appropriate, prepare a report of a crash involving any of the following:

- a. Death or injury.
- b. Property damage in excess of \$1,000.
- c. Hit and run on public roadway.
- d. Impairment due to alcohol and/or drugs.
- e. Hazardous materials.
- f. Involvement of any city/county property, vehicles, equipment, facilities, or personnel.
- g. Failure of either driver to produce a driver's license and proof of liability insurance.

3. Officers shall also be assigned to respond to the following:

- a. Any crash involving disturbances between drivers or passengers.
- b. Ones that create major traffic congestion.
- c. Those in which vehicles are damaged to the extent that towing is required.
- d. Patrol vehicles may be assigned to any other crash, not listed above, to assist persons involved with information exchange.
- e. Time permitting, officers may investigate and report on crashes as supervisors direct.

B. Responding to the crash scene

1. Officers shall respond to the scene of a minor crash code one unless the dispatcher or supervisor directs otherwise.

2. Officers shall respond code three to major crashes where there exist injuries or major road or highway blockages, or where information provided indicates the immediate need for an officer on scene.

3. The officers responding shall park their vehicles in a manner that will protect victims and the crash scene while still leaving room for emergency service vehicles.

C. Crash scene responsibilities

1. The first officer to arrive at a crash scene shall perform the following:

a. Administer any needed emergency medical care (basic life support measures) pending arrival of rescue personnel.

b. Summon additional help as required (officers, EMS, fire department, wreckers).

c. Protect the crash scene.

d. Preserve short-lived evidence (broken parts, skid marks).

e. Establish a safe traffic pattern around the scene.

f. Locate witnesses.

g. Record key crash information.

h. Expedite removal of vehicles, persons, and debris from the roadway except for fatal crashes, in which case the scene is not to be disturbed.

2. The officer assigned to a crash shall have the responsibility and authority to request assistance from any other officers as needed. He or she becomes the primary investigating officer in charge at the scene unless the supervisor determines that it is appropriate to assign these responsibilities to another officer.

3. Crash reports need not be filled out if the crash occurred on private property and the damage does not exceed \$1,000 unless the supervisor specifically asks for a report.

4. In case of extremely inclement weather where a crash involves only property damage, the dispatcher or officer may, with the supervisor's approval, perform the following:

a. Obtain information over the phone to complete the crash report and request that the involved drivers come to the department and file a report in person within 48 hours of the incident.

b. Complete a report showing the name, address, operator license number, and telephone number of each driver.

IV. PROCEDURES – CRASH SCENE

A. Collecting information

1. At the scene of the crash, the investigating officer shall gather appropriate information for a report. Information to be collected at the scene may include, but is not limited to, the following:

a. Interview principals and witnesses and secure necessary identity/address/contact information.

b. Examine and record vehicle damage.

c. Examine and record the effects of the crash on the roadway or off the roadway on private or public property.

d. Take measurements as appropriate.

e. Take photographs as appropriate.

f. Collect and process evidence.

g. Make sure that the principals exchange information, such as insurance carriers, names, and phone numbers.

B. Follow-up activities

1. Follow-up activities that may be necessary include the following:

a. Obtain and record formal statements from witnesses.

b. Reconstruct the crash.

c. Submit evidentiary materials for laboratory examination.

d. Prepare crash or offense reports to support charges arising from the crash.

2. In a particularly serious crash involving severe injuries, fatalities, or multiple vehicles, it may be necessary to summon expert or technical assistance from photographers, surveyors, mechanics, physicians, crash-crash team specialists, or other specialists. Expert assistance shall be requested through a supervisor.
3. At the crash scene, the officer may take immediate enforcement action and issue a citation for observed violations or violations witnessed and supported by the investigative process. In death cases, the district attorney may decide the appropriate charge.
4. If the investigating officer concludes that the crash was caused by a person driving under the influence of intoxicants (DWI) and the defendant is still at the scene, the DWI arrest shall be made before transport.
5. If the driver is transported to the hospital before the officer arrives and if the officer later concludes that the driver was intoxicated, an arrest warrant shall be obtained. If the driver is hospitalized, the warrant will be served when the driver is released.
6. In other traffic-related investigations, when the officer leaves the scene of the offense and later identifies an offender or offense, arrest warrants may be obtained. Citations may be issued at the hospital after the crash scene has been processed.

C. Crash scene procedures

1. Upon notification of a crash, the officer assigned shall proceed promptly to the scene. If injuries have been reported, every effort should be made to avoid delay.
2. The patrol vehicle shall not be parked at the scene in a manner that will endanger pedestrians or motorists. The officer shall consider using the vehicle as a shield to protect the scene, those involved in the crash, and others working the scene, including the officer.
3. The officer shall leave the vehicle emergency lights on.
4. At all times when investigating a crash on the streets or highways, the officer shall wear a reflector safety vest.
5. Officers shall use flares (available in each patrol vehicle) to create an illuminated warning pattern to alert other drivers. (Note: that flares may be dangerous at crashes where hazardous materials are present.)

6. In case of fire danger from leaking or ruptured gas tanks or where the crash may involve hazardous materials, the on-scene officer shall summon the fire department.

a. All patrol vehicles are equipped with a copy of the current emergency response guidebook to aid in identifying vehicles carrying hazardous materials. The guidebook illustrates hazardous materials placards and identifies and describes the relevant hazard, appropriate emergency procedures, and evacuation procedures.

b. Any officer arriving at the scene of such a crash who sees hazardous materials placards shall immediately summon the fire department. The fire chief will assume control of any scene involving hazardous materials and all officers shall provide support as required. The investigation of the crash shall begin after approval by the fire chief.

7. Any property belonging to crash victims shall be protected from theft or pilferage and, if owners are not present, it shall be taken into custody, tagged, and held for safekeeping until it is claimed by the owner.

8. City code requires any person clearing a wrecked or damaged vehicle from a highway to remove any glass or other injurious substances dropped upon the highway. Where the quantity of crash debris is too great for the wrecker operator to do this, the city public works services shall be requested. The fire department shall assist in washing down combustible substances.

9. If either driver is not present at the crash scene, do not assume that it is a hit/run unless further inquiry indicates the possibility. Perform the following actions if the incident appears to be a hit/run.

a. As soon as practicable, transmit the description of the vehicle and driver to dispatch, along with the direction of travel and time elapsed since the incident.

b. Process the crash scene as a crime scene.

D. Crash report

1. A report shall be filed on all crashes that occur on public property, or publicly accessed private property within the city if it meets any of the normal reporting criteria (death, personal injury, property damage in excess of \$1,000, or involvement of government-operated vehicles).

- a. Public property is any highway, roadway, street, or public parking lot maintained by the state, county, or city.
- b. Publicly accessed private property is a private access way or parking area provided for a client of a business, but not residential property or private parking where a fee is charged for parking.

2. In the event of a crash that occurs on private property, a crash report may be filed if it meets any of the normal reporting criteria (death, personal injury, property damage in excess of \$1000, or involvement of government-operated vehicles).

E. Disabled vehicles

1. Officers shall not push or tow any vehicle with a patrol vehicle unless the patrol vehicle is equipped with a department-approved push bar and the officer has been trained in its use.
2. Due to the risk of radio and emergency equipment, officers should not connect jumper cables to a patrol vehicle to start a person's vehicle. Officers should use a battery jump-starter or summon a wrecker if a jump-start is required.
3. Officers should direct motorists who are low on gas to the nearest station. If a vehicle is completely out of gas and no station in town is open, summon a wrecker on behalf of the motorist.