

**GENERAL ORDER**

April 2016

Immediately

**III-12**

Distribution: All Employees

**Subject: POLICE VEHICLE OPERATION**

Index as:	Driving	Escorts
	Emergency	Pursuit
	Emergency Escorts	Traffic Stops
	Emergency Mode	Vehicle Operation
	Emergency Vehicle Operation	Vehicle Stop

Accreditation Standards: 41.2.1, 41.3.3, 61.1.7, 61.3.3 and 24.03 (CFA)  
 Cross Reference: Florida State Statute 316.072, 316.126, 316.613  
 G.O. II-2, Motor Vehicle Crash Review Process  
 G.O. II-6, Take-home Vehicle Program  
 G.O. III-17, Pursuits  
 I.O. V.5:5, Communications Procedures  
 I.O. V.5:9, Auxiliary Traffic Services  
 Replaces: G.O. III-12, Police Vehicle Operation, (December 16, 2008)  
 G.O. III-12, Police Vehicle Operation\_Interim Change 05-083 (July 12, 2005)

This Order consists of the following sections: sections:

- I. Policy
- II. Definitions
- III. Routine Vehicle Operation
- IV. Emergency Vehicle Operation
- V. Blocking Roadways
- VI. Vehicle Stops
- VII. Escorts
- VIII. Supervisory/Command Responsibility

**I. POLICY**

A. It is the policy of the Department that all vehicles owned, leased or rented by the City of St. Petersburg shall be operated in a safe, courteous manner at all times.

B. At no time shall this Order or any provision of Florida State Statutes relieve the driver of any emergency vehicle from "the duty to drive with due regard for the safety of all persons, nor shall such provisions protect the driver from the consequences of his reckless disregard for the safety of others" (§316.072, F.S.S.).

**II. DEFINITIONS**

A. Emergency – A situation either reported or observed, characterized by a need for immediate police response to assure the safety of persons or property, or to apprehend a criminal suspect.

B. Emergency Mode – The operation of an emergency vehicle, utilizing warning lights and audible warning equipment, to alert others of the approach of an emergency vehicle. The use of headlights during daylight hours, spotlights, and the air horn should be considered if they will help ensure safe movement of the emergency vehicle. Hazard warning lights (4-way flashers) shall not be used as their use interferes with the normal operation of the brake and turn signals.

C. Emergency Vehicle – A vehicle owned by the City of St. Petersburg which is conspicuously marked as a police vehicle and/or equipped with warning lights and audible warning equipment. Vehicles without warning equipment are not considered emergency vehicles.

D. Pursuit – An active attempt by an Officer operating an emergency vehicle to apprehend a suspect operating a motor vehicle/boat in a manner to elude or evade apprehension. (See <J:\Research\GeneralOrders\III Operational General Orders\III-17 Pursuit of a Vehicle or Boat.pdf>.)

E. Vehicle Stop – The actions taken by an Officer, while operating an emergency vehicle, to stop a vehicle suspected of a traffic violation or offense, or for any other purpose, while the driver's behavior is not giving any indication to elude or evade apprehension.

### III. ROUTINE VEHICLE OPERATION

A. Department-owned, leased or rented vehicles shall only be operated by authorized persons and only when the operator has a valid state license to do so.

B. Seat belts shall be worn at all times by vehicle occupants when the vehicle is in motion.

C. Employees, operating vehicles in the performance of their duty, shall strictly observe all traffic laws and drive defensively in a safe and courteous manner.

1. Florida State Statute §316.217, permits a law enforcement vehicle to operate without lighted lamps while engaged in a law enforcement activity, if it can be safely accomplished. Officers may operate their vehicles without lights when doing so assists in the prevention of a criminal act or the apprehension of an offender.

2. Neither the Statute nor this policy relieves the Officer, operating without lighted lamps, from driving with due regard for the safety of others.

D. Transportation of a child five (5) years of age or younger shall be in an approved child restraint device, as required by §316.613, F.S.S.

E. Department vehicles, used for law enforcement purposes which are not on emergency calls, shall be parked as operationally necessary in compliance with Florida State Statute and local ordinances.

1. Anti-theft devices may be installed on a Department vehicle, issued to a vehicle operator or assigned to a specific vehicle.

a. If installed on the vehicle, the device shall be tested regularly by the person responsible for the vehicle, and any malfunctions shall be reported immediately to Fleet Management, or other appropriate approved facility, to have repairs made.

b. If issued an anti-theft device (e.g., The Club), the vehicle operator is responsible for it in the same manner as any other Department-issued equipment.

c. If the vehicle has been equipped with or assigned an anti-theft device, as defined in this Order, the key ring shall prominently display a notation that an anti-theft device must be used.

2. Department vehicles equipped with an anti-theft device shall be secured with the device whenever they are parked. This would include during mealtimes, attending training, meetings, presentations or other similar events. However, operators who remain in close proximity to the vehicles and are engaged in active police operations (*i.e.*, investigating crime scenes or conducting interviews, etc.) may use discretion for safety purposes in using the anti-theft device.

3. An assigned take-home vehicle, equipped with an anti-theft device, shall be secured with the device at all times when not on duty, unless the vehicle is being operated.

F. Civilian employees and volunteers, operating Department vehicles, should advise the Emergency Communications Center of the vehicle number and identity of the user.

1. Civilian employees and volunteers should be mindful that they may be perceived as Law Enforcement Officers and approached by the public for assistance.

2. If the vehicle has a radio, there is an emergency button which, if activated, activates an alarm in the Emergency Communications Center.

#### IV. EMERGENCY VEHICLE OPERATION

A. Officers may operate a police vehicle in an emergency mode only when responding to an emergency or when engaged in a vehicle stop.

1. Officers shall not pursue a suspect vehicle unless the provisions of [J:\Research\GeneralOrders\III\\_Operational General Orders\III-17 Pursuit of a Vehicle or Boat.pdf](J:\Research\GeneralOrders\III_Operational_General_Orders\III-17_Pursuit_of_a_Vehicle_or_Boat.pdf) are complied with.

2. Officers responding to reported burglary or robbery alarms should consider the probability that the alarm may be genuine. However, unless dispatched information dictates an emergency response, the response shall be made in the same manner as a routine call for service.

B. When determining the necessity to operate in an emergency mode, the Officer shall consider the need for the response, other traffic, roadway and weather conditions, and the danger to life and property.

C. Vehicles operated in an emergency mode shall, at all times, utilize emergency warning lights and audible warning devices to warn vehicular and pedestrian traffic along the route of travel.

1. The use of headlights, spotlights and the public address system should be considered if they will help ensure safe movement of the emergency vehicle. Use of the air horn is recommended to alert other drivers to the presence of the emergency vehicle.

2. Hazard warning lights (4-way flashers) shall not be used while the vehicle is in motion; their use interferes with normal operation of brake and turn signals.

D. The driver of an emergency vehicle responding to an emergency may:

1. Exceed the posted speed limit by up to 25 miles per hour, taking into account traffic, road and weather conditions.

2. Proceed past a red or stop signal or stop sign, at a speed not to exceed 15 miles per hour, and then only after ensuring the cross traffic has yielded in each lane to allow the passage of the emergency vehicle.

3. Disregard regulations governing direction of movement or turning in specified directions, when such movement can be conducted safely.

4. Park or stand, irrespective of state or local parking regulations; however, at no time should a Department vehicle block access to a fire hydrant at a fire scene or obstruct the passage of fire apparatus.

E. No police vehicle shall pass another emergency vehicle operating in an emergency mode unless the passing vehicle is also operating in emergency mode.

1. Officers wishing to pass another emergency vehicle shall weigh the absolute necessity of the maneuver against the inherent danger in doing so. The maneuver is rarely necessary.

2. No passing maneuver shall be attempted, unless the driver of the overtaking vehicle has received an affirmative acknowledgment from the driver of the lead vehicle of the intention to pass, and then only when the passing maneuver can be completed safely.

## V. BLOCKING ROADWAYS

A. Emergency vehicles may be used to block roadways or detour traffic around accident/crime scenes or other police operations.

1. When used for this purpose, all visible emergency warning equipment should be operating. Hazard warning lights may also be used.

2. When necessary, Officers should be utilized to provide additional traffic control.

B. Accident vehicles, debris, evidence, and emergency vehicles should be removed from the roadway as soon as practical.

## VI. VEHICLE STOPS

A. All vehicle stops are inherently dangerous. Known and unknown threats exist from passing traffic, bystanders, and the vehicle operator and passengers. In all cases, Officers should assess the situation and determine, when possible, if they are dealing with a traffic law violator, an unknown-risk-type stop, or if the situation can be considered tactically as a "high-risk" stop.

1. In all situations:

a. The Officer making a vehicle stop shall inform the Emergency Communications Center of the stop, as required by [J:\Research\GeneralOrders\Instructional Orders\V5-05 Comm Procedures\\_MDT, Radio, Cellular Telephone.pdf](J:\Research\GeneralOrders\Instructional Orders\V5-05 Comm Procedures_MDT, Radio, Cellular Telephone.pdf).

b. Emergency warning equipment, including the siren, air horn, and/or public address system, may be used to alert the motorist. The spotlight and/or take-down light should be used for additional Officer safety.

c. The Officer making the stop shall make every effort to direct the motorist to a suitable, safe place where normal traffic flow will not be impeded; the public address system may be utilized to direct the motorist where to stop.

1) The use of side streets is encouraged.

2) The use of private driveways and parking areas of open businesses should not be used when alternate locations are available. If their use cannot be avoided, all possible care will be taken to minimize inconvenience to property owners or patrons.

3) When conducting a stop in a residential area, the rooftop emergency/warning lights may be turned off when there is no traffic hazard nor no need to alert other police units of the location of the stop.

### B. Unknown Risk and High-risk Stops

1. Assessment of the situation, which causes an Officer to believe that something other than a routine traffic violator is being stopped, requires Emergency Communications Center notification prior to the stop and notification of a supervisor as soon as practical. Special attention is required, whenever possible, to ensure selection of the stop location and sufficient back-up resources.

2. The conduct of a "high-risk" traffic stop is based on the Officer having advance knowledge or sufficient reasonable cause to believe the vehicle contains a felony suspect. Early communications with the Emergency Communications Center and a Supervisor are required to ensure Officer and citizen safety. The supervisor shall marshal appropriate resources and respond to the scene to assist in the employment of felony-stop procedures.

C. Unmarked Police Department vehicles may be used for traffic enforcement when operated by uniformed Officers, and the vehicle is equipped with visual and audible warning devices to properly alert motorists of their identity.

D. Plainclothes Officers and detectives shall not routinely make traffic stops, unless the actions of the violator are a clear danger to pedestrian or vehicular traffic and no marked police vehicle is readily available.

## VII. ESCORTS

### A. Emergency Escorts

1. Civilian vehicles shall not be escorted for medical emergencies. Fire Rescue or EMS shall be summoned as needed.
2. Officers shall escort other emergency vehicles only with the approval of a Supervisor; e.g., ambulance, fire or other law enforcement vehicles.

### B. Non-Emergency Escorts

1. Officers shall not escort another vehicle without the approval of a supervisor.
2. Generally, the only escorts that should be approved are those that would be required under the provisions of Permit Assignment Work, for example:
  - a. Public officials;
  - b. Dignitaries;
  - c. Funerals;
  - d. Oversize vehicles;
  - e. Hazardous or unusual cargo.

## VIII. SUPERVISORY/COMMAND RESPONSIBILITY

- A. Field supervisors are responsible for monitoring the operation of emergency vehicles while being operated in both routine and emergency modes.
- B. Field supervisors are also responsible for upgrading or downgrading the status of a response to calls for service and for controlling the number of units necessary to respond.

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