

GENERAL ORDER

April 2016

Immediately

III-12

Distribution: All Employees

Subject: **POLICE VEHICLE OPERATION**

Index as:	Driving Emergency Emergency Escorts Emergency Mode	Emergency Vehicle Operation Escorts Pursuit Traffic Stop	Vehicle Operation Vehicle Stop
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Accreditation Standards: 41.2.1, 41.3.1, 41.3.3, 61.3.3

Cross Reference: G.O. II-02, Motor Vehicle Crash Review Process
G.O. II-06, Take-home Vehicle Program
G.O. III-17, Pursuits
I.O. V.5:05, Communications Procedures_ MDT, Radio, Cellular Telephone
§§ 316.072, 316.126, 316.613, Florida Statutes

Replaces: G.O. III-12, Police Vehicle Operation, (April 28, 2016)

This Order consists of the following sections: sections:

- I. [Policy](#)
- II. [Definitions](#)
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- IV. [Emergency Vehicle Operation](#)
- V. [Blocking Roadways](#)
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I. POLICY

- A. It is the policy of the Department that all vehicles owned, leased or rented by the City of St. Petersburg will be operated in a safe, courteous manner at all times.
- B. At no time will this Order or any provision of Florida 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 or her reckless disregard for the safety of others." (§ 316.072, Florida Statutes)

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) will 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 G.O. III-17, Pursuit of a Vehicle or Boat.)
- 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 will 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, will strictly observe all traffic laws and drive defensively in a safe and courteous manner.
 - 1. Section 316.217, Florida Statutes, 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 will be in an approved child restraint device, as required by section 316.613, Florida Statutes.
- E. Department vehicles, used for law enforcement purposes which are not on emergency calls, will be parked as operationally necessary in compliance with Florida statutes and local ordinances.
- 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. Civilian employees will not operate a Department vehicle in emergency mode.
- B. 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 will not pursue a suspect vehicle unless the provisions of G.O. III-17, Pursuit of a Vehicle or Boat 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 will be made in the same manner as a routine call for service.

- C. When determining the necessity to operate in an emergency mode, the officer will consider the need for the response, other traffic, roadway and weather conditions, and the danger to life and property.
- D. Vehicles operated in an emergency mode will, 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) will not be used while the vehicle is in motion; their use interferes with normal operation of brake and turn signals.
- E. Pursuant to section 316.072, Florida Statutes, the driver of an emergency vehicle responding to an emergency may:
 - 1. Exceed the maximum speed limits so long as the driver does not endanger life or property.
 - 2. Proceed past a red or stop signal or stop sign, but only after slowing down as may be necessary for safe operation.
 - 3. Disregard regulations governing direction of movement or turning in specified directions, so as long as the driver does not endanger life or property.
 - 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.
- F. No police vehicle will 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 will weigh the absolute necessity of the maneuver against the inherent danger in doing so. The maneuver is rarely necessary.
 - 2. No passing maneuver will 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.

In all situations:

1. The officer making a vehicle stop will inform the Emergency Communications Center of the stop, as required by I.O. V5-05 Communications Procedures-MDT, Radio, Cellular Telephone.
2. 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.
3. The officer making the stop will 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.
 - a. The use of side streets is encouraged.
 - b. 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.
 - c. 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. Special attention is required, whenever possible, to ensure selection of the stop location and sufficient back-up resources.
2. The decision to conduct 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.
 - a. A patrol supervisor will be notified as soon as practical.
 - b. The supervisor will marshal appropriate resources and respond to the scene.

- 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 will 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 will not be escorted for medical emergencies. Fire Rescue or EMS will be summoned as needed.
2. Officers will 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 will 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.

Anthony Holloway
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