

St. Joseph, Missouri Police Department



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SUBJECT: Traffic Collision Investigations		
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I. Policy

The Department will investigate traffic collisions, not only to determine causation and traffic law violations, but also to obtain engineering data, to protect the rights of those involved, and to assist in traffic education.

II. Procedure

- A. Members shall respond to reported motor vehicle collisions that occur on any City or State maintained roadway including, but not limited to, the following:
 1. Fatality collisions;
 2. Injury collisions;
 3. Non-injury collisions;
 4. Collisions involving those drivers impaired by alcohol and/or drugs;
 5. Hit and run collisions;
 6. Collisions that create major traffic congestion;
 7. Collisions involving hazardous materials;
 8. Collisions involving City or other Government vehicles and/or property; and
 9. Reported motor vehicle collisions that occur on private property, including:
 - a. Fatality collisions;
 - b. Severe injury collisions;
 - c. Hit and run collisions;
 - d. Collisions involving drivers impaired by alcohol and/or drugs;
 - e. Collisions involving City or other Government vehicles and/or property; and
 - f. Collisions where extensive property damage exists.
- B. Members will normally respond to the collision location with emergency lights and siren activated including, but not limited to, the following situations:
 1. Fatal injuries have been reported;
 2. Injuries have been reported;

3. A vehicle involved is attempting to leave the scene;
 4. A disturbance between the accident victims occurs;
 5. An alcohol or drug impaired driver is involved; or
 6. The collision location occurs in a high traffic volume location;
- C. Members will normally respond to the collision location without emergency equipment activated when:
1. Property damage **only** has been reported; or
 2. An emergency response would create a safety hazard to the public (school zones with children present, road construction areas with limited roadway width, etc.)
- D. Members shall ensure that complete and thorough investigations of motor vehicle collisions are conducted.
- E. Members shall accurately complete all appropriate reports related to traffic collisions.
- F. Incidental Response:**
1. The member assigned to the collision scene shall be in charge except under the following conditions:
 - a. He/she is relieved by a Traffic member in the event that injuries or fatalities dictate the investigation be done by the Traffic Division; or
 - b. A Traffic Supervisor takes charge.
 2. Any on-duty member of the Department may be dispatched as the initial police response to a motor vehicle collision.
 3. If damage is extremely minor and if the parties involved ask if they can exchange information, members can advise them to do so when:
 - a. Both drivers possess a valid driver's license, valid proof of insurance, and the Missouri State Highway Patrol Uniform Reporting System Guidelines for use of the "long form" does not apply.
 4. The responding member first on the scene of a motor vehicle collision shall take steps to stabilize the scene and shall:
 - a. Attempt to ensure that no additional injuries or damage occurs; and
 - b. Position his/her patrol vehicle in such a manner as to warn oncoming traffic of the situation, protect the scene, isolate the immediate area and activate emergency lighting systems.
 5. Once the scene is protected, the initial on scene member(s) shall check collision victims for possible injuries and shall:
 - a. Request medical assistance, when appropriate; and
 - b. Administer necessary first aid, when appropriate.
 6. The initial member(s) on the scene shall be alert to potentially dangerous vehicle fluids (i.e. gasoline, oil, antifreeze, battery acid) and shall perform the following functions:
 - a. Members shall check for any possible existing fire, and shall:
 - 1) Remove any non-essential people from the scene; and
 - 2) Request a response by the St. Joseph Fire Department.
 - b. Members shall check for any other hazardous materials. Types of hazardous materials being transported may be determined by:
 - 1) Placards on the side of the truck;
 - 2) Shipping papers in the cab of the truck;
 - 3) Labels on individual containers inside the truck; and

- 4) Interviewing the driver of the truck.
- c. If hazardous materials exist, members shall:
 - 1) Request a response by the St. Joseph Fire Department; and
 - 2) Remove all people from the immediate area of the collision, giving consideration to the wind direction.

G. Reporting Methods

1. Officers of this Department shall complete a **long form** Missouri Uniform Accident Report when they are dispatched to the scene of an accident. **At no time shall an officer advise the parties involved to call in and make the report later.** The Missouri Uniform Accident Report form shall be completed for all assigned motor vehicle collisions, including:
 - a. Death or injury;
 - b. Property Damage;
 - c. Hit and run;
 - d. Impairment due to alcohol or drugs;
 - e. Hazardous materials; and
 - f. Private property collisions involving:
 - 1) Death or severe injury;
 - 2) Hit and run;
 - 3) Impairment due to alcohol or drugs; and
 - 4) City or other Government owned vehicles.
2. Members shall complete other necessary report forms for each assigned collision.

H. Additional Resources

1. The primary member assigned to the scene of a motor vehicle collision shall request additional resources to safely and accurately complete the investigation including, but not limited to, the following:
 - a. Additional members to assist with the collection of data; direct traffic, complete measurements, take photographs, etc.; and
 - b. Specialized equipment (i.e. roller-tapes, additional lighting).

I. Collision Investigations:

1. Members shall complete a thorough and accurate investigation of assigned vehicle collisions that are reportable under State Law.
2. Members shall ensure that all drivers involved in the motor vehicle collision exchange information with each other. This information should include:
 - a. Name and vehicle owner's name;
 - b. Vehicle license number, color, model, year, VIN#; and
 - c. Vehicle insurance information.
3. All drivers involved in the collision who are capable of receiving the above information shall be supplied with the police report "case" number.

J. Gathering Information at a Collision Scene

1. Members shall use all available resources and information to complete the investigation.
2. Members shall attempt to separate involved drivers before questioning them about the collision.
3. Members shall attempt to locate unbiased witnesses to the collision.

- a. Passengers in a vehicle involved in the collision should not be considered unbiased;
 - b. Witnesses should be interviewed and their information noted; and
 - c. Witness names, addresses, and daytime phone numbers should be obtained and recorded on the collision report form.
- 4. Members shall evaluate physical evidence at the scene in order to support or discredit the claims of persons involved. Such physical evidence includes, but is not limited to, the following:
 - a. A possible approximate point of impact; and
 - b. An assessment of damage amounts and/or locations on all involved vehicles.
- 5. The following conditions in the area of the collision should be noted:
 - a. The road condition (wet, dry, icy, etc.);
 - b. The condition of the traffic control devices;
 - c. The terrain of the area; and
 - d. The presence of possible obstruction(s) to a driver's vision.
- 6. Members shall monitor the drivers and determine any unusual conditions such as:
 - a. Signs of impairment due to alcohol and/or drugs;
 - b. Any physical limitations of the driver(s); or
 - c. Signs that a minor injury may be more serious.

K. Property of Collision Victim(s)

- 1. The member in charge of the investigation shall be responsible for the security of property (at the scene) if a collision victim is unable to care for same.
- 2. If a collision victim is transported from the scene, members shall attempt to have small items of value transported with the victim. These may include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - a. Wallets, billfolds, purses;
 - b. Checkbooks;
 - c. Jewelry;
 - d. Items possibly containing cash (bank bags, etc.); and
 - e. Prescription drugs.
- 3. Items of value may be released to a family member of a collision victim.

L. Towing and Removal of Involved Vehicles and Related Debris:

- 1. Members shall be responsible for ensuring that the vehicles involved and/or related hazardous debris are removed in a timely manner.
- 2. Members shall attempt to honor any request made by a collision victim concerning personal preference for the removal of his/her vehicle from the scene. The tow service shall be in accordance with Department Policy and Procedure (See Department GO0119 "Abandoned Property Police Towing Procedure").
- 3. If a victim has no preference for a towing company, members shall request the Tow Company that is next on the Department's rotating list of tow companies.
- 4. If the victim is incapacitated and cannot select a tow service, the Tow Company that is next on the rotating list of tow companies shall tow the victim's vehicle.

5. If there is the possibility of felony charges being filed on a driver (Second Degree Assault, Manslaughter, etc.) the City contract Tow Company shall tow the vehicle and a "HOLD" shall be placed on the vehicle.
6. If a Tow Company is called to remove a vehicle from the scene, members shall ensure that the tow truck operator removes all hazardous debris.
7. If no Tow Company is needed at the scene, members shall request the following agencies to be notified to remove the debris when:
 - a. On a City maintained roadway and/or right of way, the St. Joseph Street Department will be requested; and
 - b. On a State maintained roadway and/or right of way, the State Highway Department will be requested.
8. If the collision involved is a "hit and run", debris at the scene possibly left by the suspect vehicle may be collected as evidence when:
 - a. It could be used to match with the suspect vehicle. However, articles such as dirt, fluids, etc., shall not be collected; and
 - b. Any debris collected as evidence shall be handled in the same manner as all evidentiary items.
9. If a small amount of debris exists, and the Tow Company responsible for removing it has not arrived by the time the member completes the collision investigation, the member should attempt to remove the debris out of the roadway (to the curb edge, etc.).

M. Hit and Run Collisions:

1. Members assigned to investigate Hit and Run collisions shall handle them in the same manner as other motor vehicle collisions and shall complete some additional tasks.
2. As soon as possible after arriving at the scene of a "hit and run" collision, members shall relay information about the suspect vehicle to the Communications Center. Members shall determine and relay the following information:
 - a. Suspect vehicle description;
 - b. Suspect vehicle license information, if available;
 - c. Suspect vehicle direction of travel; and
 - d. Number and description of suspect vehicle occupants, if available.
3. Members assigned to the initial investigation shall make every reasonable attempt to locate the "hit and run" suspect/vehicle, and shall perform the following functions:
 - a. If the suspect is located, the investigating member shall mark the appropriate boxes on the report form; and
 - b. If the suspect is not located, the investigating member shall complete an accident report form, listing all available information.
4. Victims of a "hit and run" collision shall be referred to the Traffic Division for follow-up information.

N. Private Property Vehicle Collisions:

1. Under certain circumstances, members shall be assigned to investigate private property motor vehicle collisions. These conditions include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a. The collision involves an injury;
- b. A suspected alcohol/drug impaired driver is involved;
- c. The collision involves a "hit and run";
- d. A Government vehicle is involved, or
- e. Extensive property damage exists.

O. Collision Follow Up Investigations:

1. Department Policy dictates that follow up investigations shall be conducted by specially trained members under certain situations.
2. Follow up investigations of fatality and serious injury collisions shall be conducted by:
 - a. The Traffic Division Supervisor and/or his designee.
3. Follow up investigation on injury crashes shall be handled by:
 - a. Patrol members assigned to the initial investigation;
 - b. Traffic members assigned to the initial investigation; or
 - c. If Patrol members conducted the initial investigation, Traffic members may either assist them or take over the follow up investigation, when applicable.
4. The Traffic Unit Supervisor may assign further follow up investigation if an initial investigator failed to identify and/or locate a suspect involved in a hit and run collision.

P. Traffic Emergency Status/Walk-In Reports

1. Under circumstances that greatly affect the Department's ability to respond to motor vehicle collisions, a "traffic emergency status" may be declared.
2. The on-shift ranking Supervisor may declare an emergency status.
3. The following factors shall be considered in declaring a "traffic emergency status":
 - a. Existing weather conditions (snow, ice, storm, etc.);
 - b. Number of non-injury collisions being worked and/or holding; and
 - c. Availability of resources to handle the collisions.
4. When an emergency status is in effect, citizens reporting motor vehicle collisions shall be instructed to make an online or delayed report if the following conditions exist:
 - a. All vehicles involved can be driven;
 - b. The collision does not involve an injury; and
 - c. There is no alcohol and/or drug-impaired driver involved.
5. "Walk in" reports may also be completed when the Department was not notified at the time the collision occurred. "Walk in" reports shall be reported on the Department Accident Investigation Report.
6. The Commander/Supervisor who declared the emergency status shall monitor conditions and return the Department's response to normal as soon as conditions allow. If the member who had declared the emergency status ends his/her tour of duty before the status can be returned to normal, that person is responsible for relaying the status information to an on-coming Commander or Shift Supervisor.

Q. Fatal and Potentially Fatal Vehicle Collisions:

1. The Traffic Division contains members that have specialized collision reconstruction skills. Such members shall be called upon to investigate fatal, potentially fatal, and very serious injury vehicle collisions.
2. Traffic members assigned to investigate fatal and potentially fatal vehicle collisions are responsible for the following:
 - a. When appropriate, ensuring photographs are taken that depict the collision scene, including vehicles involved, sight distance, and possible evidence;
 - b. Collecting appropriate physical evidence (light bulbs, speedometers, vehicle parts, etc.);
 - c. Obtaining measurements by utilizing baseline coordinate, triangulation methods, or using the Total Station for preparing a scene diagram;
 - d. Examining the vehicles involved to determine amount and cause of damage and/or any potential vehicle defects that may have contributed to the collision;
 - e. Completing a comprehensive narrative report that includes pertinent details on the sequence of events (i.e. prior to, during, and after impact); and
 - f. Completing any necessary follow-up investigation and/or interview(s).
3. Patrol Division members who arrive at the scene of a fatal or potentially fatal vehicle collision shall, as soon as practical:
 - a. Notify an on duty supervisor;
 - b. Notify on duty Traffic members as soon as they become available;
 - c. Secure the collision scene to prevent vehicles and/or pedestrians from entering the area by the use of barricades and crime scene tape;
 - d. Locate potential witnesses and obtain their names, addresses, and telephone numbers; and
 - e. Obtain written statements whenever possible.
4. The Traffic Division Supervisor shall be contacted by the current Patrol Shift Supervisor whenever possible. The Traffic Supervisor shall then make a determination whether to call out off-duty Traffic members for additional support to complete the investigation. If the Traffic Supervisor cannot be contacted, the Shift Supervisor shall have the discretion to also call out additional off-duty Traffic members

R. Notification Procedure:

1. Members assigned to investigate a collision that involves a confirmed fatality or potential fatality shall notify the Shift Supervisor immediately. The Shift Supervisor shall ensure that other appropriate Department members are notified, including:
 - a. The Traffic Unit Supervisor and the Patrol/Detective Commanders; and
 - b. The Chief of Police.

Chris Connally, Chief of Police

Date