



University of Wisconsin–Madison Police

Policy: 61.2

SUBJECT: TRAFFIC COLLISION INVESTIGATION

EFFECTIVE DATE: 06/01/10

REVISED DATE: 12/31/11, 11/01/13

REVIEWED DATE: 06/01/12

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POLICY:

The University of Wisconsin–Madison Police Department shall establish guidelines and procedures for reporting an investigation of traffic collisions. Agency activities connected with, or related to traffic collisions include providing emergency assistance to the injured, protecting the collision scene, conducting on-scene and follow-up investigations, preparing reports, and taking proper enforcement actions relative to the incident.

DEFINITIONS:

“Traffic collision investigation” refers to collection of factual information which includes identifying and describing persons, roads, and vehicles involved in a collision; describing the results of the collision in terms of damage to vehicles and roadside objects, injury to people, marks and residue on the roadway, and final positions of the vehicles and bodies; interpretation of these facts in terms of behavior of road users involved; and sometimes, an attempt to specify the particular combination of factors required to produce that collision.

“Traffic collision reporting” refers to basic data collection to identify and classify a traffic collision and the persons, vehicles, times/location, planned movements involved, and possible contributing factors, such as traffic law violations.

PROCEDURE:

61.2.1.1 TRAFFIC COLLISION INVESTIGATION AND REPORTING POLICIES

The following shall govern investigation and reporting regarding traffic collisions:

- A. Officers shall report on all collisions that meet or exceed the state specified requirements for reporting. Officers will conduct an on-scene investigation of all traffic collisions involving the following:
 - 1. Death or injury
 - 2. Property damage meeting or exceeding the state specified requirement for reporting
 - 3. Hit and run
 - 4. Impairment due to alcohol and/or drugs
 - 5. Hazardous materials
 - 6. Occurrences on jurisdictional private property or parking areas
- B. In cases of collisions involving death or serious injury or hazardous materials release, more than one patrol officer will be assigned to respond.
- C. Any crash involving the following will be investigated as if it occurred on a public highway and a state traffic crash report will be completed:
 - 1. Death or personal injury
 - 2. Hit and run
 - 3. Reckless driving
 - 4. Driver impairment due to alcohol and/or drugs
 - 5. School bus involved in crash
 - 6. Injured pedestrian or bicyclist involved in crash
 - 7. Hazardous materials released as a result of crash
- D. Officers responding to and investigating traffic collisions not meeting or exceeding the state level reporting guidelines shall conduct a non-reportable, driver information exchange form, even if the traffic collision involves a single vehicle/operator.

- E. Officers completing the state traffic crash report shall issue all parties in the crash the agency case number for later reference. For crashes requiring a non-reportable driver information exchange form, the investigating officer shall issue to involved parties copies of the form or the agency case number.

61.2.1.2 TRAFFIC COLLISIONS INVOLVING DEPARTMENT VEHICLES

The following shall govern procedures for reporting traffic collisions involving Department vehicles:

- A. Traffic collisions occurring on campus will normally be investigated by the shift police O.I.C. If the accident involves serious injury or death, an outside agency must also be requested to investigate.
- B. Traffic collisions occurring off campus will be reported for investigation to the agency having jurisdiction.
- C. In the event of a traffic collision involving Department vehicles or personnel which are investigated by other agencies, the police shift O.I.C., if practical, will go to the scene, conduct an independent investigation and submit an incident report.
- D. The investigating agency will be requested to provide a copy of its completed report.
- E. The employee involved in an accident, regardless of location, will submit Incident and Risk Management reports describing the facts and circumstances surrounding the accident. The employee's first line supervisor will ensure that the form is completed.

61.2.2 TRAFFIC COLLISION TYPES REQUIRING OFFICER RESPONSE

The following traffic collision types require an officer response:

- A. One or more officers shall respond to the scene of a traffic collision involving any of the following:
 1. Death or injury.
 2. Hit and run. At least one officer should be dispatched to the scene, while other officers are checking the area for the offending vehicle.
 3. Impairment of an operator due to alcohol and/or drugs. At least two officers will respond.
 4. Damage to public vehicles or property.
 5. Hazardous materials. The Madison Fire Department Hazardous Materials Unit should be dispatched if any release occurs.
 6. Disturbances between principles involved in the traffic collision. At least two officers will respond.
 7. Major traffic congestion as a result of the collision. At least two officers will respond initially, advising of further assistance as needed.
 8. Damage to vehicles to the extent towing is required.
- B. During a complex or serious traffic collision investigation, responding officers shall provide needed emergency services, investigate the collision, record short-lived evidence, and restore normal traffic flow. The first responding officers may need to activate the incident command system.
- C. In less serious traffic collisions and at the discretion of a field supervisor, property damage only collision reports may be handled by directing principles involved to the police station or to an alternate area where a report will be made. This process may be implemented if severe weather exists, field personnel are unavailable because of priority or other emergencies, or several collisions are occurring at or about the same time.
- D. In cases where one of more of the involved drivers leaves the scene of the traffic collision and responds to the station or telephones to make a report, an officer shall be assigned to document information from the parties. The responding officer shall not decline to take a report based only on the involved vehicle or vehicles being moved.

61.2.3 TRAFFIC COLLISION SCENE RESPONSIBILITIES

The following outlines responsibilities of responding officers at traffic collision scenes:

- A. For traffic collisions involving property damage and/or injury, the primary officer shall take charge of the collision scene immediately upon arrival. When authorized emergency medical and/or fire services personnel respond, authority for the care of injured persons and fire suppression should be entrusted to them. In general, the assigned primary officer responding to the collision scene will retain charge of the scene until completion of the operation;

exceptions include arrival at the scene by supervisory personnel or when supervisory personnel re-assign responsibilities. Officers who respond to assist at traffic collisions involving property damage and/or injury will provide support as appropriate depending on the circumstances of the collision.

- B. For traffic collisions involving a fatality or a probable fatality, the first officer on scene should initiate the incident command system. The first responding supervisor may assume responsibilities of incident command.
- C. For officer involved traffic collisions, the officer involved will exercise charge over the collision scene only until the arrival of the first responding officer, to whom the responsibility will be surrendered.
- D. In the event of a traffic collision, the on-duty police communications operator should refer the following information to the responding officers: the location of the incident, the presence and severity of injuries, whether or not traffic is blocked, and other assigned units.
- E. Officers directed to a collision scene should choose the best approach route considering traffic flow and congestion problems. Officers should operate with due regard to the traffic collision scene. While enroute to the scene officers should be alert for vehicles leaving the vicinity which exhibit indications of involvement in a collision.
- F. As soon as possible upon encountering an unreported traffic collision, officers will notify the communications center of the exact location, the presence and severity of injuries, whether or not traffic is blocked, and any other pertinent information.
- G. When approaching a traffic collision scene officers should be alert for and avoid destroying evidence. During the approach and upon arrival, officers will be cognizant of any specific conditions or factors that may have contributed to the collision. These may include presence of view obstructions, inoperative or missing traffic control devices, or other hazards. Officers shall park their vehicles in such a manner as to provide an actual protection to the scene. Officers will assess the scene to determine the need to summon assistance for emergency medical services, fire fighting services, protection of the scene, traffic control, and additional investigative skills.
- H. If there is an injury at a traffic collision, officers should administer appropriate medical aid within their ability to the injured person. If there are multiple injuries, officers should identify those most seriously injured. Officers shall summon appropriate emergency medical assistance to the scene and assist in getting injured persons removed to the medical facility as soon as possible. Unless exigent circumstances exist, officers should not transport injured persons at a traffic collision in a police vehicle. At collision scenes where there is injury, actions to deal with the injury will take precedence over investigative or reporting activities. Normally, persons suffering obvious fatal injuries are kept at the scene until their removal is ordered by the Coroner.
- I. If there is a potential for a fire at a traffic collision, officers will take appropriate action to stabilize the conditions by providing adequate protection to the scene, isolating the immediate area, removing persons from the vicinity of the hazard if possible, suppressing the hazard if possible, and summoning the fire department for assistance. To the extent possible, officers will attempt to eliminate the possibility of sparks or other ignition from smoking, flares, electricity, and any other source to a traffic collision. If a fire exists, officers should, if possible remove persons in the vicinity of the fire, extinguish the fire, and summon the fire department. Depending on the extent of the fire, officers will evacuate the surrounding area and maintain isolation of the area until the fire is suppressed. Officers should carefully control the movement of vehicles in the vicinity of the fire or potential fire hazards, detouring traffic if necessary.
- J. Officers must be cognizant of the possibility that at any traffic collision involving a cargo vehicle, potentially hazardous material may exist. Officers must remain cautious and observant for any evidence or indications of hazardous materials before approaching cargo involved in collisions. When approaching the scene of a collision where there is a possibility of a hazardous material spill, officers should approach the area from an up-wind direction if possible. Upon arrival at the collision scene the officer shall attempt to make a preliminary identification of the hazardous material based on placards, vehicle type, containers, or information supplied by the operator of the vehicle. This preliminary investigation should be made from a safe distance. When there is a question whether spilled material at a collision scene is hazardous, an officer shall avoid contacting the material and keep others away from it. Officers should avoid inhaling fumes, smoke, or vapors. Both odor-less and gas or vapors with odors may be harmful. The Emergency Response Guidebook published by the U.S. Department of Transportation should be referenced for the rapid identification of the shipping name of the hazardous material and concerning the nature of the

hazard. The Emergency Response Guidebooks are available in each patrol squad and also in the communications center. The officer arriving at the scene of a collision involving a hazardous material shall immediately request response by the Madison Fire Department.

- K. In a property damage or minor injury traffic collision, the officer assigned to handle the report shall be responsible for interviewing or coordinating the interview of any involved parties or witnesses. In a serious or life-threatening or fatal traffic collision, the officer assigned to handle the initial report will initiate or coordinate the initial interviews. Interviewing officers should question drivers and/or witnesses separately and should discourage drivers or witnesses from discussing the collision with each other prior to any interview. Officers should interview drivers and witnesses as soon as possible after a traffic collision. Questioning may be delayed until the person has received medical attention, regained emotional stability, or attended to other urgent matters. When interviewing drivers and/or witnesses, officers shall be objective and exhibit diplomacy and understanding. They should be alert to any physical or emotional impairment, including drug or alcohol impairment. Witnesses should be interviewed as to their location when they witnessed the collision, what they were doing at the time, what called their attention to the collision, and what they saw and heard.
- L. Officers shall check the damage sustained by each vehicle involved in the collision. A thorough examination and evaluation of the damaged area may corroborate other evidence and statements as to how the collision occurred. However, the extent of the vehicle condition reporting depends on the seriousness of the collision and other extenuating factors. Items to be checked may include, but are not limited to: the tires for proper inflation or damage, the vehicle for proper outward visibility through all windows, the interior of the vehicle for loose material that may have interfered with the driver, the mirrors, and the lights on the vehicle. The officer should note which lights are on at the time of examination, which lights are broken, and the position of the light switches. The officer should never switch lights on to see if they work as this can destroy valuable evidence.
- M. At a traffic collision, officers will note conditions of the road during the investigation at the scene for inclusion in the report. Officers should be alert for any foreign substance on the surface, note the condition of the surface, the clarity of the roadway, the grade, the width of the lane, and the condition of the roadway edge. Officers should check for individual obstructions and for the proper function of traffic control devices in the area. Officers will record weather conditions existing at the time of the collision.
- N. All traffic collisions requiring completion of a state traffic collision report shall include a diagram. Diagrams may be based upon statements, from evidence. Standardized symbols shall be used when diagramming a traffic collision scene. In the case of a fatal or probable fatal traffic collision, a scaled diagram shall be made. Measurement will be taken by the triangulation or coordinate method.
- O. When the investigating officer determines photographs are appropriate, they may photograph or coordinate the photographs of the scene. An evidence technician may also be requested, dependent upon the complexity of the traffic collision scene. The officer photographing the collision shall identify in the report the type of camera used and the photographs taken. Photographs are to include an overview with permanent fixed objects, varying angles, short-lived and temporary evidence, close-ups of physical evidence including marks on roadways, vehicle damage, and other items determined to be of evidentiary nature.
- P. The officer assigned to the collision investigation is responsible for the preservation and collection of any evidence. Officers will make every attempt to preserve evidence in place until it can be properly recorded and recovered.
- Q. Officers will explain to drivers involved in the collision their responsibilities in reporting the collision. Officers will assist the drivers involved in the collision in exchanging information if necessary.
- R. In the interest of protecting the scene and clearing the roadway, officers shall use their police vehicle lighting and other warning devices as necessary to alert approaching traffic to the potential danger. If the roadway is blocked by debris and/or vehicles and the need to preserve evidence no longer exists, the officer will clear the roadway as soon as possible.
- S. The officer assigned to investigate the traffic collision should ensure that property belonging to the collision victims is protected from theft and is moved to a place of safekeeping if the owner is unable to care for it. Items of significant value and items readily accessible to theft should not be left with the vehicle.

61.2.4 TRAFFIC COLLISION INVESTIGATION FOLLOW-UP

The following shall govern follow-up investigations for traffic collisions:

- A. The Department will perform follow-up traffic collision investigation services, generally in support of on-going or anticipated criminal prosecution. The Investigative Services Captain or designee may assign an investigator or refer the case to the primary investigating officer for follow-up. The follow-up may include collecting off-scene data, obtaining and recording formal statements from witnesses, reconstructing the traffic collision, and preparing formal reports to support charges.
- B. Follow-up reports shall be reviewed by a supervisor and, if charges are involved, the case shall be forwarded to the District Attorney's Office for prosecution.
- C. At times, follow-up traffic collision investigations require special skills and technical assistance not available within the Department. This may include surveyors, mechanics, physicists, physicians, engineers, and other experts. The employment of outside technical assistance should be coordinated with approval from a supervisor.
- D. Traffic collision follow-up investigations may also require assistance from other agencies including but not limited to: the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, neighboring jurisdictions, or the Wisconsin State Patrol.