

FLORENCE POLICE DEPARTMENT GENERAL ORDER

Subject: TRAFFIC COLLISION INVESTIGATION	Procedure: General Order 29.2.1 CALEA 61.2.1	Total Pages: 10
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I. POLICY

It is the policy of the Florence Police Department to investigate and report traffic accidents occurring within the city limits of Florence. The level of investigation will be based upon the nature, severity, and location of the accident.

II. PURPOSE

This written order establishes uniform policies and procedures for investigating motor vehicle accidents that occur within the Department's jurisdiction.

III. SCOPE

This written order is applicable to all personnel.

IV. RESPONSIBILITY

All affected personnel will comply with this directive.

V. PROCEDURES

- A. **GENERAL:** Any Officer dispatched to investigate a traffic accident, or who discovers an accident while in a police vehicle, will ensure the accident is investigated in a thorough and professional manner.
 - 1. If traffic accident investigation is not normally within the Officer's job assignment, that Officer will be responsible for notifying Dispatch to send another Officer to investigate the accident.
 - 2. If immediate police action is required, the initial officer (regardless of his/her job assignment) will stand by with the accident until the investigating Officer arrives.

- B. **ACCIDENT REPORTING:** Non-injury, minor and non-serious traffic accidents generally require the reporting of basic information (i.e., Alabama Uniform Traffic Accident Form via eCrash). A more thorough investigation is required on the following types of traffic accidents:
 - 1. Death or injury (serious and visible injuries);
 - 2. Major or significant property damage;
 - 3. Leaving the scene;
 - 4. Impairment due to alcohol and/or drugs; or

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5. Hazardous materials.
 6. Occurrences on private property (Property Damage Incident Reports will be completed, via Spillman Reporting System, in such instances. See PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION OF TRAFFIC ACCIDENT REPORTS in this directive).
- C. TRAFFIC COLLISION RESPONSE, GENERAL: Officers will respond to the following types of traffic accidents:
1. Death or injury (serious and visible injuries);
 2. Leaving the scene/hit and run;
 3. Impairment of an operator due to alcohol and/or drugs;
 4. Damage to public vehicle or property;
 5. Accidents involving shipments of hazardous materials;
 6. Disturbances between principals;
 7. Major traffic congestion as a result of the accident;
 8. Damage to vehicles to the extent towing is required; or
 9. **Any other accident as dispatched;** and
 10. Private property accidents involving death, injury, a driver who left the scene, a disturbance reported, a city vehicle involved, alcohol or drugs involved, public property damaged or where it cannot be determined that there are no injuries.
- D. SERIOUS ACCIDENT RESPONSE: One or more officers will respond to the scene of a serious or complex accident to provide emergency services, investigate the accident, record short-lived evidence, and restore the normal flow of traffic. In less serious accidents, the existing workload and availability of officers will influence officer response.
- E. INCLEMENT WEATHER RESPONSE: During periods of inclement weather with extremely poor road conditions, a Shift Commander may place officers on limited accident response. During these times accident reporting will be curtailed. Non-injury accidents where vehicles can be driven, and involve no previously mentioned factors, such as “Driving Under the Influence,” would normally not be investigated.
- F. FIRST OFFICER ON THE SCENE: Duties that require immediate attention upon arriving at the accident scene include:
1. Check accident victims for injuries, administer first aid (where practical), and provide for basic life support. Supervisors will be notified in the event of possible life threatening injuries, and/or when a traffic fatality has occurred. Supervisors should ensure that Traffic Homicide Investigators and the on-call Detective is notified in the event of a traffic fatality.

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2. Request ambulance and/or additional assistance (e.g., additional Officers, tow truck, etc.);
 3. Protect the accident scene. Officers will accomplish this by parking their patrol vehicle in such a manner as to shield the accident scene. Police emergency lights will be activated while the vehicle is in the roadway.
 4. Officers will take necessary steps to preserve short-lived evidence;
 5. Establish a safe traffic pattern around the scene;
 6. Locate witnesses and record accident information; and
 7. Expedite the removal of vehicles, persons, and debris. This practice is necessary to the safety of officers and the public and must be done quickly.
 - a. Failure to expedite removal from the roadway of vehicles involved in accidents results in unnecessary congestion and may be a contributing factor in additional serious collisions, especially on highways.
 - b. Whenever possible, motorists should be encouraged to remove vehicles from the roadway. This should be limited to accidents which do not involve injuries and have only property damage.
 8. Distribute Florence Police Driver/Witness statement forms to both drivers and all identified witnesses.
 9. Ensure that any remaining debris is removed from the roadway.
- G. **INVESTIGATIVE RESPONSIBILITY:** The officer assigned to the call is responsible for investigating the accident, and is in charge of the accident scene, unless otherwise designated by a supervisor, and/or traffic homicide investigator. When available, traffic officers will assume investigative responsibility for crashes involving personal injury.
- H. **ACCIDENT SCENE PROCEDURES:** When investigating accidents, the officer will insure that the “Alabama Uniform Traffic Accident Report” is filled out completely and accurately, according to the “Alabama Uniform Traffic Accident Instruction Manual.” This report will be submitted electronically through eCrash. The report will document the investigation, to include:
1. Interviewing principals and witnesses;
 2. Examining and recording vehicle damage;
 3. Examining/recording effects of the accident on the roadway, or other public or private property;
 4. Diagramming the accident scene;

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5. Taking photographs, as appropriate; and
 6. Collecting and preserving evidence. If extensive or complex measurements, photographs, and/or collection and preservation of evidence is needed, the supervisor at the scene will request a traffic homicide investigator.
 7. The officer will inform both drivers about how to obtain copies of traffic accident reports. Officers shall instruct drivers that the accident reports will generally be available for pickup after five (5) business days.
- I. FOLLOW-UP INVESTIGATIONS: Accident investigation follow-up is the responsibility of the on-scene investigating officer. The investigation of traffic fatalities, or any other type accident as determined by a supervisor, may be conducted by a traffic homicide investigator and/or a criminal investigator. In such cases, the following items will be addressed as needed:
1. Collection of accident scene data;
 2. Obtaining recorded formal statements from witnesses;
 3. Reconstruction of accidents; and
 4. Preparing formal reports to support criminal charges arising from the investigation.
- J. COMMERCIAL MOTOR VEHICLE INSPECTION: If a commercial vehicle or a vehicle transporting hazardous materials is involved in an accident, and it is suspected of being in an unsafe or unlawful condition, or the driver reports an accident-causing defect, whenever possible a Motor Carrier Safety Inspector should be called to the scene to inspect the vehicle.
- K. ENFORCEMENT ACTION: Officers are expected to take positive enforcement action whenever their traffic accident investigation or reporting activities produce probable cause to believe that a violation of law or ordinance has occurred.
1. Specific enforcement actions arising from traffic accident investigation or reporting (e.g., physical arrest and citation for Driving Under the Influence, or other offense) will be consistent with the nature of the alleged violation and with all written directives concerning traffic law enforcement.
 2. In taking positive enforcement action, the officer must establish all elements of the violation. Elements that the officer has not personally witnessed must be established through investigation. The investigation may include but will not be limited to:
 - a. Statements or admissions made by the alleged violator;
 - b. Statements of the witnesses; and/or

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- c. Physical evidence.
 3. In accordance with Alabama Code 32-5-171, “Any law enforcement officer, as defined in Section 36-21-40, subsequent to a traffic accident, may issue a traffic citation to a driver of a vehicle involved in the accident when, based on personal investigations, the officer has prima facie evidence demonstrating grounds to believe that the person as committed any offense under Chapter 5, 5A, 6, 7, or 7A of Title 32.”
- L. **TRAFFIC DIRECTION AND CONTROL:** Traffic direction and control will be determined by the investigating officer. Additional officers will be requested as needed. The Department of Transportation, Florence Utilities, and/or City Street Department will be notified for additional temporary traffic control devices as needed.
1. Should traffic control be needed for an extended period of time, the on-duty supervisor will arrange for sufficient relief at least every two (2) hours for officers remaining at the traffic control point.
 2. NOTE: During periods of extreme cold or inclement weather, the on-duty supervisor will determine an appropriate relief schedule.
- M. **SPECIAL HAZARDS AND HAZ-MAT INCIDENTS:** An important responsibility of officers responding to any accident scene is to keep the situation from becoming worse. This responsibility may take on added importance and complexity when an actual or potential fire hazard or hazardous material is present at the scene. Under such circumstances, officers may be called upon to perform certain special activities, and to coordinate their activities with those of personnel from various other agencies. Priorities for action are likely to be affected by the extent and nature of the hazards present.
1. The Department will remain aware of the responsibilities, practices and procedures of other agencies that respond to and/or provide technical assistance relating to fire hazards and hazardous materials incidents. Officers will be kept informed of these responsibilities, practices and procedures to ensure the best possible coordination and delivery of services at traffic accident scenes involving such hazards.
 2. **GUIDEBOOK:** The department will allocate a copy of the current issue of the U.S. Department of Transportation “EMERGENCY RESPONSE GUIDEBOOK” for hazardous material incidents for each patrol shift. The department will ensure training in the use of the guidebook is conducted for each officer. Officers will participate in the training and will refer to and follow the Guidebook’s recommendations for taking emergency and other actions appropriate to specific hazardous material incidents.
 3. **AWARENESS OF POTENTIAL INCIDENTS:** Officers will

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remain aware of the fact that ANY traffic accident involving a cargo vehicle is potentially a hazardous materials incident and will be alert for any evidence/indication of hazardous material before approaching such vehicles.

- a. Upon arrival at the scene of an accident involving a cargo vehicle, officers will attempt to make a preliminary identification of the cargo based on placards visible from a safe distance.
 - b. When there is any question whether spilled material at an accident scene may be hazardous, officers will avoid contacting the material and keep other persons from contacting the material, to the extent possible. Officers will then notify a supervisor of the situation.
 - c. Officers will follow the procedures specified in the "EMERGENCY RESPONSE GUIDEBOOK" to complete the identification of hazardous materials, take appropriate emergency action, and notify relevant agencies (i.e., Florence Fire, etc.).
4. FIRE HAZARDS: Vehicles on or threatened by fire should be managed in the following manner:
- a. If a potential for fire is present, officers will take appropriate action to stabilize 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 technical resources from the Fire Department, as necessary.
 - b. Officers will attempt to eliminate the possibility of sparks or other ignition from smoking, flares, electricity, or any other source, to the extent possible.
 - c. If a fire exists, officers will rescue persons in the vicinity (if possible) and request fire fighting assistance as necessary.
 - d. Depending upon the extent of the fire, officers will evacuate the surrounding area and maintain isolation of the area until the fire is suppressed.
 - e. Officers should carefully control the movement of vehicles within the vicinity of the fire or potential fire hazard, detouring traffic if necessary.
- N. CONTROL OF PROPERTY BELONGING TO ACCIDENT VICTIMS:
The officer at the scene of an accident should ensure that property belonging to an accident victim is protected from theft and is removed to a place of safekeeping if the owner is unable to care for it.

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1. Where practical, property found inside a vehicle at the scene of an accident should be secured with the vehicle. Items of great value, items readily accessible to theft, money or firearms WILL NOT be left with the vehicle. Such items will be properly inventoried and processed according to current procedures.
2. All found property for which ownership cannot be readily identified will be inventoried and processed according to current procedures.
3. When officers must take custody of victim's personal property, this should be done in the presence of witnesses when possible. Witnesses will be listed on their report.
4. Whenever it is necessary to release a victim's property to another person or agency, officers will complete a "Property Receipt" with the person receiving the property signing for that property.

O. PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION OF TRAFFIC ACCIDENT REPORTS

1. Officers will submit the initial traffic accident report to a supervisor by the end of the shift. Driver/Witness statements should accompany the accident report.
2. Officers investigating a traffic accident will complete the required traffic accident report forms as follows:
 - a. The following report forms are mandatory:
 - 1) Alabama Uniform Traffic Accident Report, using the E-Crash system;

NOTE: This information will be used to provide factual data upon which to base future traffic engineering decisions or recommendations, e.g., analysis of high-incident accident locations, support of selective traffic enforcement programs, and possible traffic engineering deficiencies. When evidence of such deficiencies is found, the department will undertake, or recommend to appropriate authorities, sight-distance and other appropriate engineering studies of the affected areas.
 - 2) Driver/Witness Statement Form, when available; and
 - 3) Damage to Private Property Incident Report will be used in lieu of the above reports under the following circumstances:
 - a) Incidents arising from PRIVATE

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PROPERTY ACCIDENTS (as previously described);

- b) DELAYED ACCIDENTS (reported after the fact), or when a standard report is declined by drivers and not required by state laws.
- b. The following traffic accident forms may also be necessary when investigating certain types of accidents:
 - 1) Incident Report Supplement, to document the names, ages, addresses and telephone numbers of any passengers;
 - 2) Alabama Uniform Traffic Accident Report Supplement, if additional space is needed to complete the accident report;
 - 3) FPD Tow-In Report, if a vehicle involved in a traffic accident needs to be held for evidence (e.g., DUI case, traffic fatality, serious injury);
 - 4) Commercial Vehicle Supplement Form, to document information concerning vehicles meeting the CMV description;
 - 5) Evidence Sheet, if property must be turned in as evidence, or turned over to another agency or person; and
 - 6) Incident Report if the accident involves a vehicle suspected of leaving the scene of the accident, to document the investigation of a serious-injury or fatal traffic accident, or to record other violations not enforceable by the officer.

VI. E-CRASH ACCIDENT REPORTING SYSTEM

- A. All officers will utilize the on-line traffic accident computer system (eCRASH) for filing accident reports. Records personnel will be responsible for the entry of those accidents reports into SPILLMAN.
- B. The traffic accident report will be generated from the information the officer inputs into eCRASH based on a fill in the block format. The officer will supply the requested information in each block and is responsible for verifying that all input information is correct. The eCRASH system will not allow submission of the information until all blocks are completed and it will indicate an error at the bottom of the screen for any incomplete blocks. The eCRASH system is designed to generate complete and accurate reports in a timely manner.
- C. PROCEDURES

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1. Access to the eCRASH system is entered by signing in to the MOVE program. Modifications can be made by officers when necessary.
2. If a driver license reader is available, the officer will be able to scan the license of drivers and witnesses to fill in the name blocks. If no license reader is available, the officer may run the drivers license numbers in the MOVE program and then transfer that information to the blocks for the driver's and witness's names.
3. All blocks, including the diagram and the narrative are to be completed before submitting the accident for approval.
 - a. Supervisors may make modifications to or reassign reports for modifications after they are submitted by accessing and retrieving the report through eCRASH.
 - b. Modifications require that the report be resubmitted for approval.
4. Event numbers and any associated case numbers/accident numbers are to be entered into the narrative.
5. Names, addresses and phone numbers of witnesses are to be entered by the officer.

D. APPROVAL

1. The approval of the traffic accidents will be conducted by Patrol Supervisors.
2. Patrol supervisors will access the eCRASH system daily to approve any accidents that have been generated.
3. The Patrol Supervisor will review each report for accuracy including but not limited to:
 - a. Date and time
 - b. Narrative
 - c. Diagram
4. If the accident report is deemed to be correct, Patrol Supervisors will click the "approve" button, allowing the system to forward the report to the State of Alabama.
5. If the accident report is incorrect, a supervisor will click the "reject" button, and send the report back to the officer for correction. When the reject button is used, the system asks for a reason, this gives the officer information as to what is wrong with the report and how to correct it.
 - a. The officer will have 5 days to correct the accident and re-submit. This should be done sooner if possible for the

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computer only allows for 4 reports (per officer) to be stored at one time, including any reports the officer is currently working on. If the officer is unavailable, his/her supervisor will ensure the necessary corrections are completed.

- b. Once the officer has the report corrected, he will again click the “submit” button to send for approval. The report will again need to be reviewed.
- c. Reports received by the State are reviewed again for accuracy. If approved, it is placed on line as a certified copy. If rejected, it is returned to the officer for correction and the process begins again from the start.

E. RECORDS

- 1. Once the report is placed on line as a certified copy, it is ready to be retrieved by records personnel. The Records Clerks will access the web page daily and retrieve the certified reports.