

CAMBRIDGE POLICE DEPARTMENT

Title: *TRAFFIC ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION* **Procedure: 4.604**

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Revised:

PURPOSE:

To establish guidelines for the Department's traffic accident reporting and investigation process.

POLICY:

The Police Department carries out its accident management responsibility consistent with the nature and severity of the accident, the most efficient use of personnel and resources, and the statutory reporting requirements of the State.

DEFINITIONS:

TRAFFIC ACCIDENT REPORTING

Traffic accident reporting is defined as the basic collection of information to identify and classify a traffic accident; the time, location, persons and vehicles involved. This includes planned movements and any contributing factors such as traffic law violations.

TRAFFIC ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

Traffic accident crash investigation is defined as the collection of information describing and identifying:

- participants and injuries,
- vehicle damage,
- roadway condition, marks, residue,
- final positions of vehicles/bodies.

Interpreting these factors with the contributing factors involved, and an attempt to satisfy the particular elements required to produce that type of accident.

SERIOUS TRAFFIC ACCIDENT

A serious traffic accident is defined as a crash where a death has occurred, injuries

are so severe that survival cannot be expected, or there has been a loss of limb.

PROCEDURE:

TRAFFIC CRASH REPORTING AND INVESTIGATION

1. Officers of this Department will respond to the scene and meet the reporting and investigative responsibilities of any traffic crash that involves:

- death or injury;
- leaving the scene of a crash;
- impairment of an operator due to alcohol and/or drugs;
- hazardous materials;
- damage to public vehicles or property;
- disturbances between the parties involved;
- major traffic congestion as a result of the crash;
- damage to vehicle(s) if towing is required.

2. Officers responsible for investigating a traffic crash will perform the following minimum activities:

- upon arrival, park the police vehicle in such a way as to provide maximum protection to the scene but without endangering the public or officer;
- assess the scene to determine the need for other emergency services;

request medical aid when necessary;

note special conditions or factors that may have contributed to the crash (such as natural hazards, visibility obstruction, inoperative traffic control device, etc.);

record short lived evidence and protect the scene for evidence when the need for further investigation appears evident;

locate and interview witnesses;

notify the shift supervisor when supervisory direction appears to be warranted;

issue appropriate traffic citations when applicable;

expedite the removal from the roadway of vehicles, persons, and debris; and

complete all required forms for routine traffic crashes before their tour of duty ends unless otherwise directed by the shift Supervisor.

3. Officers will respond to crashes occurring on private property and investigate and report their findings when the traffic crash involves:

death or injury;

damage to any vehicle in excess of \$500;

impairment of an operator due to alcohol and/or drugs;

hazardous materials;

damage to public vehicles or property;

disturbances between the parties involved; and,

hit and run crashes.

4. If the crash does not meet the criteria then a self report is completed with the officer facilitating the information exchange.

5. Officers are expected to take positive enforcement action whenever the accident investigation leads them to believe that a violation has occurred. Elements not personally witnessed by the officer must be established through the investigation. When evidence exists to satisfy all elements of a particular violation, enforcement action should be taken. Enforcement actions will be consistent with the Department's procedures and policies concerning traffic law enforcement.

ACCIDENT SCENE STABILIZATION

1. An important responsibility of officers responding to any accident scene is to keep the situation from becoming worse. This responsibility takes on added complexity when traffic is blocked or hazardous materials are present. Officers may be called upon to perform certain special activities, and to coordinate their activities with those of personnel from various other agencies.

2. The first officer to arrive at the scene shall be responsible for the following:

position his vehicle to protect the scene and any persons that may be involved;

request medical aid when necessary;

preserve evidence;

traffic direction and control at the accident scene; when necessary use flares, barricades, and traffic cones for the temporary detour of traffic;

request additional assistance if necessary,

locate witnesses; and expedite the clearing of the roadway.

3. Officers responding to the scene of an accident are generally responsible for the handling of the following hazards until properly relieved by fire and/or medical personnel:

Injuries - Officers shall summon emergency medical assistance to the scene and assist in getting injured persons removed to medical facilities as soon as possible.

Handling Fire Hazards - If fire is a potential hazard, officers will take appropriate action to stabilize the conditions to the best of their abilities and summon the fire department when necessary. Officers will attempt to eliminate the possibility of ignition to the maximum extent possible. Officers should evacuate and isolate the area as is necessary and carefully control movement within the vicinity of the hazard, detouring traffic if necessary.

Handling Hazardous Materials - upon arrival at the scene of a traffic accident involving hazardous materials, officers should attempt to identify the cargo on the basis of placards from a safe distance. If hazardous materials are identified, immediately notify the fire department, according to Department procedure.

TRAFFIC DIRECTION AT ACCIDENT SCENES

1. Officers who must perform traffic direction and control activities at crash scenes will allow for the safe ingress and egress of emergency vehicles and provide for a system of alternate routes for other vehicles as necessary. The following will be used by officers to aid in protecting themselves and the scene:

- flares;
- traffic cones or barricades;
- marked police vehicle with emergency lights activated; and

reflective traffic safety vests.

2. In cases that involve only property damage and the vehicles are driveable, drivers should be directed by the investigating officer to remove their vehicles from the traffic lanes as soon as possible, unless there are extenuating circumstances.

COLLECTING OF AT SCENE INFORMATION

1. Information to be collected at the scene of the accident by the investigating officer should include the following:

Interviews of the principals and witnesses. Officers should question drivers and witnesses separately and individually. In the case of a minor accident, this questioning is usually done at the scene. When accidents of a more serious nature are investigated, the officer should obtain a brief account at the scene and follow up at a more stable location, preferably the police station. When questioning drivers, officers should be alert for any physical or emotional impairment that may have affected the person's driving ability.

Examining and recording vehicle damage. Officers should check vehicle equipment, controls and systems for defects that may have contributed to the accident. If there is serious injury or death, officers may place an investigative hold on vehicles for closer examination and evaluation of the damaged area that may coincide with other evidence and statements as to how the accident occurred.

Examining and recording effects of the accident on the roadway. Officers should note all conditions of the road during the investigation at the scene. Officers should check such factors as foreign substances on the road surface; the condition of the surface; the lane markings, grade, width, alignment and condition of the shoulder. Officers

should also note any obstructions that existed at the time of the collision. Weather conditions should also be noted.

Taking photographs, as appropriate. Photographs should be taken when necessary.

Field Sketches. Sketches should be prepared as may be necessary and appropriate for investigative purposes and attached to the original report.

Collecting and preserving evidence. Collection and preservation of evidence is required at the accident scene.

Exchanging of information among principals. Officers will issue the State required forms and explain to drivers involved their responsibilities in reporting the accident as necessary and appropriate and assist them as necessary in providing information to the other persons involved in the accident.

2. When officers come into possession of property belonging to accident victims, they will ensure it is protected from theft and remove it to a place of safekeeping until it can be returned to the owner. If the item cannot be returned to the owner at the scene it will be inventoried and stored in evidence.

SPECIALIZED CRASH INVESTIGATION AND FOLLOW-UP

1. In the event the initial investigating officer needs assistance in completing a traffic accident investigation, he will contact his immediate supervisor who will determine the appropriate action to be taken to ensure prompt and proper completion of the accident investigation.

2. Special training has been provided to Department personnel in the area of on scene accident investigation. An accident reconstructionist will be assigned or called out to investigate any traffic accident involving the following:

All fatal accidents

All serious personal injury accidents involving injuries likely to result in permanent disability, (i.e., loss of limb, eye, severe burns).

Any other accident situation where special circumstances are present, such as potential liability to the City and the on duty Supervisor determines that the services of an accident reconstructionist are required.

3. The Communication section has a listing of personnel qualified to assist in accident investigations. The on-duty Supervisor must authorize the assignment of accident reconstructionists

4. Officers requesting assistance will make every effort to preserve the accident scene for the accident investigator. The patrol officer assigned the initial call is responsible for completion of the required accident report. The accident reconstructionist will be responsible for any supplemental or investigative reports and diagrams.

5. Follow up reports are the responsibility of the accident Reconstructionist. Enforcement action will be coordinated between the reporting officer and assigned accident reconstructionist.

6. The Department recognizes that follow up accident investigations may require special skills and technical assistance beyond that available from its personnel. When necessary and appropriate, the Administrative Lieutenant will approve the use of outside expert and technical assistance, i.e., mechanics, physicians, safety inspectors. Adequate justification for the need for such assistance will be required before approval will be given.

HIT AND RUN ACCIDENT INVESTIGATIONS

1. Every reasonable effort will be made to locate and identify the driver of the vehicle which has left the scene of a crash.

2. An accident report will be completed on any hit and run crash where evidence is available.

3. The investigating officer will attempt to recover and inventory any useful evidence that will help identify the driver and vehicle involved.

4. The investigating officer will attempt to locate and interview any witnesses that may have seen or have knowledge of the accident.

5. When a hit and run crash occurs and there is no evidence available a CODE 90 or 91 can be assigned the call.

6. In the case of a hit and run crash in which information such as a license number of the vehicle, or the identity of the driver is known, the officer will make an attempt to contact the driver/owner and complete the investigation.

7. If for reasons of time, manpower shortage, jurisdictional boundaries or the investigating officer is unable to make contact with the driver/owner, the investigation will be turned over to the Criminal Investigations Division for follow up.

8. The investigator assigned to a hit and run crash is responsible for all supplemental reports documenting his investigation.

9. When sufficient evidence is available to sustain prosecution, hit and run drivers are to be charged with the specific offense of leaving the scene of an accident.

10. The investigating officer is to maintain personal communication with other parties involved in the accident and is to advise them of the progress and status of the investigation.

REPORTING

1. The officer assigned to the accident will be in charge of the investigation (unless the crash is assigned to an accident

reconstructionist and responsible for the completion of the initial report.

2. The Department will use the Maryland Automated Accident Reporting Systems (MAARS) form provided by the State for an accident occurring on public or private property. Departmental supplemental forms will be used for follow up investigations.

3. Those accidents where a formal report is not required may be documented on the computer reporting system The following information should be documented and verified:

license numbers of vehicles involved;

drivers license for each drivers;

location of where crash occurred and brief description of what occurred;

date and time;

4. Supervisors will ensure that all reports are complete, accurate and submitted before the officer completes his tour of duty.

REPORTING DAMAGE TO STATE AND CITY PROPERTY

1. Officers investigating traffic accidents, which result in damage to, State or City owned property will ensure the incident is documented on a MAARS form. Included in the report should be the extent of the damage and the driver's insurance information.

2. Traffic accidents which result in damage to City owned property will be reported on a MAARS form. The Damage to City Property form will also be completed.

3. Damage to street lights, fire hydrants, and other City owned property will be photographed when necessary. The communications operator will notify the proper utility company or City Department if their services are needed. Unnecessary call out of Department of Public Works personnel should be avoided if the problem can be handled during the next business day without creating any adverse problems.

4. The Administration will forward all traffic accident reports with damage to City property to City Hall.