



Policy 409
Occupational Health and Safety
Emergency Response Driving
05/24/2001
Rev 03/10/09

Scope:

This standard applies to the drivers of an emergency vehicle owned or operated by the department while responding to an incident. This policy applies to all members and employees of the fire department. This applies to full time, part time, paid on call, and volunteer members and employees of the fire department.

Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to establish safety guidelines for the operation and driving of emergency vehicles. Emergency response creates an increased risk to firefighters and to other users of the roadways. The increased risk must be balanced against the potential benefits of faster response in situations where lives and/or property are at risk.

Emergency response shall be limited to situations where prompt response is likely to reduce the risk of death, serious injury or disability, or preventable damage to property.

Definition:

Emergency: A situation in which there is a high probability of death or serious injury to an individual, or of significant property loss.

Due Regard: Actions that a reasonable and careful operator performing similar duties and under the same circumstances would take.

Recklessness: Conduct which is consciously done with willful disregard of the consequences.



General:

Fire department vehicle operations are classified as either “emergency” or “non-emergency.” During “non-emergency” operations, fire department vehicles shall comply with all of the traffic laws and rules of the road that apply to all other vehicles. The specific exceptions to traffic laws that apply to emergency vehicles shall only be exercised during authorized emergency operations.

1. Emergency Response Classifications
 - a. Smoke or fire in a building
 - b. Outside fire with exposures
 - c. Car Fires
 - d. Gas leak.
 - e. Hazardous materials release with persons in distress
 - f. Auto Accidents with Injury
 - g. Critical medical incident

2. Non-Emergency Response Classifications
 - a. Automatic fire alarm system activation – no human report of smoke or fire
 - i. The first due unit, ambulance or commander may respond emergent.
 - b. Residential smoke alarm sounding – no indication of smoke or fire
 - i. The first due unit, ambulance, or commander may respond emergent.
 - c. Carbon monoxide alarm – no indication of person(s) in distress
 - d. Outside fire without exposures (Controlled burns)
 - e. Smoke in the area – no indication of source
 - f. Electrical wires arcing or down.
 - g. Hazardous materials release – no indication of person(s) in distress
 - h. Water leak
 - i. Unknown odor – no symptoms or persons in distress
 - j. Relieve units at the scene of an incident that is under control
 - k. Medicals from the Hiawatha Care Center.

3. Following the above recommendations, the officer on the apparatus shall determine if an event requires an emergency response. The officer may elect to upgrade an event to emergency response. A fire officer on scene may also elect to downgrade a response as appropriate.



4. At time of writing, Linn County dispatch does not utilize a recognized call prioritizing or screening process. While their “suggestions” should be taken into consideration, they are not “orders”. The company officer on the vehicle has the final say. Area Ambulance (CMed) DOES utilize a call processing system and their recommendations for mutual aid to CR should apply.
5. PD officers on scene may downgrade responses, and their recommendations should be taken as “orders”. Disagreements or concerns regarding a downgrade by a PD officer will be handled by the command staff.

Use of Warning Devices:

Warning lights and audible warning devices shall be used when fire department vehicles are responding in an emergency mode. Generally speaking, both warning lights and audible devices must be operated in order to meet the legal definition of an emergency vehicle.

Warning lights shall be used at all times when fire department vehicles are operating in an emergency response mode. Audible warning devices (siren and/or horn) shall be used as necessary to warn other drivers and pedestrians of the approach of an emergency vehicle and request the right-of-way. Audible warning devices shall be used in moderation when they are not required to provide warning (light traffic or open road situations).

Audible warning devices shall not be used when a vehicle is operating in a non-emergency mode. Warning lights shall be used when the fire department vehicle is maneuvering or stopped in a location where it creates a traffic hazard.

Speed:

The driver shall never exceed a speed that is safe and prudent, based on road and weather conditions and other circumstances, including the design and capabilities of the vehicle. The posted speed limit may be exceeded only when the required warning devices are in use and when weather, traffic, and road conditions are favorable. **The posted speed limit shall not be exceeded under any other conditions.**

Fire Apparatus and Ambulances shall not exceed the posted speed limit by more than 10 MPH, and then, only when conditions allow. In no case shall a fire apparatus or ambulance exceed 75 miles an hour, even on the interstate.



When conditions are unfavorable, the posted speed limit shall not be exceeded and actual speed shall be determined by the conditions.

The posted advisory speed for a curve shall be considered the maximum allowable speed under all conditions, regardless of response condition.

Intersections:

The fire department emergency vehicle shall come to a full stop before entering a negative right-of-way intersection (red light, flashing red light, or stop sign), blind intersection, or any intersection where hazards are present and/or the driver cannot account for all oncoming traffic lanes. The emergency vehicle shall not enter the intersection until all approaching traffic has yielded the right-of-way and it is safe to proceed. The emergency vehicle driver shall ensure that all approaching vehicles in all lanes have yielded the right-of-way before advancing.

When passing through an intersection where the emergency vehicle has the right-of-way, by virtue of a green light in the direction of travel and/or a stop signal (stop sign) for cross-traffic, the emergency vehicle shall not exceed 15 MPH. Emergency vehicle drivers should not assume that oncoming/opposing traffic has stopped, even when facing a green signal or “clear” route; emergency vehicle drivers must visually confirm that oncoming/opposing traffic is stopped while approaching any intersection, and be prepared to stop immediately, if necessary.

Opposing Traffic Lanes:

Operating emergency vehicles in opposing traffic lanes is extremely hazardous under all conditions and should only be considered under exceptional circumstances (i.e., if there is no alternate route of travel).

When an emergency vehicle must travel in an opposing traffic lane, or in a center turn lane to maneuver around slow moving or stopped traffic, the emergency vehicle shall not exceed 15 miles-per-hour. (Actual speed, up to the specified limit, should depend on the road, traffic and weather conditions, and local terrain.)

When approaching a controlled intersection (traffic lights or stop signs) in an opposing traffic lane or center turn lane, the emergency vehicle shall come to a full stop before entering the intersection, even if the traffic light is green in the direction of travel.



Travel in an Opposing Direction:

Operating emergency vehicles against the normal flow of traffic requires extreme caution and should only be considered under exceptional circumstances (i.e., if there is no alternate route of travel). Travel against the normal direction of traffic flow on a one-way street shall be limited to short distances. Emergency vehicle drivers must proceed slowly and with extreme caution in these situations.

The emergency vehicle must come to a full stop before entering an intersection while traveling in an opposing direction.

Passing:

When overtaking traffic that is moving in the same direction, the emergency vehicle driver shall give other drivers an opportunity to yield the right-of-way before passing. If it is necessary to pass a vehicle that has not yielded the right-of-way, the emergency vehicle shall provide as wide a clearance as possible.

A fire department emergency vehicle shall not overtake another emergency vehicle that is traveling in the same direction unless the driver of the lead vehicle has indicated that the other may pass. A following vehicle may contact a leading vehicle by radio to request permission to pass.

All emergency vehicles are should pass on the left side of traffic traveling with them. When necessary to pass on the right due to traffic conditions, vehicles should slow to less than 15 MPH.

Railroad Crossing:

All emergency vehicles shall come to a full stop at unguarded railway grade crossings. Caution shall be exercised at grade crossings where warning lights and/or gates are provided.

School Bus:

Emergency vehicles shall not pass a school bus that has stopped with red lights flashing to load or discharge passengers, unless the bus driver clearly signals that it is safe to pass by activating his yellow lights and deactivating his red lights.

When clearly signaled by the bus driver that it is safe to pass a stopped school bus, the emergency vehicle shall proceed slowly and with extreme caution past the school bus; all



members must be vigilant for children while approaching and passing the bus. The emergency vehicle driver must be prepared to stop immediately while approaching, passing, and leaving the area in which the school bus is stopped.

School Zone:

The emergency vehicle shall not exceed the posted school speed limit when approaching a School Zone when students are present.

Pedestrian Crosswalk:

The emergency vehicle shall not exceed the posted speed limit when approaching a pedestrian crosswalk. If the crosswalk is occupied, the emergency vehicle shall slow down and be prepared to stop if the pedestrian does not yield the right-of-way.

Law Enforcement Officer:

The emergency vehicle shall comply with the directions of a sworn law enforcement officer, including a signal to stop. Law enforcement officials may also direct the specific positioning, or repositioning, of emergency vehicles on an incident scene in order to maintain traffic flow, reduce bottlenecks, enhance scene safety, and prevent secondary collisions. Compliance with such direction is generally required of emergency vehicle drivers; if a difference of opinion regarding scene safety arises, it should be resolved in a cooperative fashion with the ranking law enforcement officer on the scene.

Aggressive Driving:

Emergency vehicle drivers shall not employ aggressive driving techniques to force other drivers to yield the right-of-way.

Emergency vehicles must be operated with due regard for the safety of civilian traffic at all times, and under all circumstances; the elimination of aggressive driving techniques is also critical for protecting the safety of other crew members assigned to the vehicle.

Special Driving Procedures

Backing: Before backing a fire department vehicle, the driver shall ensure that the intended path is clear of hazards or obstructions. One or more spotters shall be employed as guides in all situations. Two spotters should be assigned when backing large or heavy apparatus—one covering each side of the vehicle. When available, a third spotter can be used to monitor traffic or, especially in the case of aerial apparatus, watch the front of the vehicle for overhead obstructions.



The spotter(s) shall be on the ground, to the rear of the vehicle, and shall remain visible to the driver at all times. If the driver loses sight of the spotter(s) at any time, the driver shall immediately stop the vehicle. (NFPA 1500 requires at least one spotter to have contact with the driver.)

If it is essential to back a vehicle with limited rearward visibility and no spotter is available, the driver shall stop, dismount, and visually perform a 360-degree check around the vehicle before backing, with emphasis on the area behind and to both sides. After checking the area, the driver shall back the vehicle at slow speed and with extreme caution, prepared to stop immediately if necessary.

Maneuvering at an Incident Scene:

Drivers shall exercise extreme caution while maneuvering emergency vehicles at an incident scene. Vehicles shall be moved slowly and cautiously, with spotters assigned to guide the driver in tight situations.

When streets have been closed to regular traffic, the emergency vehicle driver remains fully responsible for the safe and prudent operation of the vehicle at all times.

When operating at an incident scene where the streets have not been closed to regular traffic, fire department vehicles shall be positioned, parked, or staged in a manner that considers safety as a primary factor.

Check for Unsecured Personnel:

Before moving an emergency vehicle in any location, the driver shall ensure that all occupants are seated and properly secured in approved riding positions. The driver shall ensure and the officer shall verify that no one is in the process of mounting, dismounting, standing on top of, or on the outside of, the vehicle. They shall ensure that all compartment doors are closed, and there is no loose equipment on the outside of the truck

Under no circumstances shall members be allowed to ride on the outside of a moving apparatus, including the tailboard, roof, aerial platform/bucket, or a top-mounted pump panel. The Chief may grant special exceptions for this during “parades” where additional safety precautions are taken.

Enforcement

1. A member of the command staff may take disciplinary actions against a member who fails to adhere to this policy. Action may include, but is not limited to.



- a. Removal of Driving Privileges
 - b. Return to probationary status
 - c. Denial of work hours or pay per call status.
 - d. Denial of Educational or Training opportunities
 - e. Suspension.
 - f. Removal from the department.
2. As failure to observe this policy could result in serious injury or death to employees or civilians. First step disciplinary action may include immediate suspension or removal from the department.