



POLICY/PROCEDURE NUMBER: 07-L.E.-005

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SUBJECT: TRAFFIC COLLISION INVESTIGATION

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AMENDS/SUPERSEDES: December 7, 2007 version; January 27, 2010 version; February 16, 2011 version; January 8, 2014 version; January 7, 2015 version.

IACLEA STANDARDS: 10.2.1, 10.2.2

CSU POLICE SYSTEMWIDE POLICY: NO

APPROVED: Gregory L. Murphy, Chief of Police

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this directive is to establish guidelines for the investigation of traffic collisions occurring within the jurisdictional boundaries of the California State University, Northridge Department of Police Services.

II. POLICY

Traffic collisions are investigated by officers to determine the cause and to review any violation(s) of the California Vehicle Code and California State University regulations. Collision information is also used to educate the public and allow the department to provide a safer environment where vehicles travel, and to protect the rights of the citizens involved.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. Roadway: As defined per California Vehicle Code Section 530, a roadway is that portion of the highway improved, designed, or ordinarily used for vehicular traffic.
- B. Traffic Collision Investigation: Collection of factual information identifying and describing people, roads, and vehicles involved in a collision; description of the results of the collision in terms of damage to vehicles and roadside objects, injuries to people, marks and residue on the road, and final positions of vehicles and bodies; interpretation of these facts in terms of behavior of road users involved; and, sometimes, an attempt to specify the peculiar combination of factors required to produce that particular collision.
- C. Traffic Collision Reporting: Basic data collection to identify and classify a traffic collision and the persons, vehicles, time/location, planned movements involved, and possible contributing factors, such as traffic law violations.
- D. Traffic Control Device: All signs, signals, markings, and devices placed on, over, or

adjacent to a street or highway by authority of a public body or official having jurisdiction to regulate, warn, or guide traffic.

- E. Traffic Engineering Authorities: Persons responsible for traffic engineering in various local, regional, and state agencies.
- F. Traffic Law Enforcement: Law enforcement as it applies to statutes, ordinances, and legally authorized regulations relating to the use of streets and highways and ownership/operation of motor vehicles and other road vehicles.
- G. Traffic Law Enforcement Action: The part of traffic law enforcement involving arrests, citations, or warning of any person alleged to have violated a law, ordinance, or regulation pertaining to the use of traffic ways, when the person has knowledge of this action and when it is to (1) prevent such violation from endangering persons or property or inconveniencing other users of the traffic-way, (2) prevent continued violation, or (3) discourage recurrences.
- H. Traffic Law Violation: Violation of any statute, ordinance, or legally authorized regulation relating to the use of streets and highways or the operation and ownership of motor vehicles and other road vehicles.
- I. Traffic Patrol: The part of law enforcement traffic supervision that consists of driving or walking within an area or a roadway for the purpose of providing protection, security, and service to the public.
- J. Traffic Survey: An examination of traffic characteristics, such as volume, speed, delay, collisions, origin, destination, etc.

IV. PROCEDURES

- A. Collisions which are considered priority in nature shall include those which are reported or believed to involve:
 - 1. Death or injury;
 - 2. Hit-and-run collision;
 - 3. Impairment of a driver due to intoxication of some form;
 - 4. Other criminal activity;
 - 5. Damage to public vehicles or property;
 - 6. Hazardous materials;
 - 7. Disturbances between principal parties;
 - 8. Collisions which cause severe traffic congestion;
 - 9. Collisions which require towing services;
 - 10. Public or mass transportation vehicles;
 - 11. Agency vehicles; and

12. Accidents occurring on private property.
- B. Section 16000(a) of the California Vehicle Code requires that a collision be reported to the Department of Motor Vehicles within 10 days when it involves:
1. Death;
 2. Injury; or
 3. Damage to any party that exceeds \$750.00.
- C. Officers of this department shall additionally complete a traffic collision report or investigation when:
1. The collision involves a state vehicle (including University owned carts) except in cases in which a California State University, Northridge Police Services vehicle or the vehicle of a high ranking member of the University is involved. In such exceptional cases, the California Highway Patrol shall be requested to investigate and complete a traffic collision report. For additional details on the reporting and investigation of accidents involving state vehicles, the shift supervisor, when applicable, shall comply with the procedures outlined in the CSUN Office Insurance and Risk Management webpage: <http://www.csun.edu/risk/how-to-report-accident>.
 2. An officer is making an arrest or issuing a citation at the scene of a violation and the violation was a primary factor in the collision.
- D. Officer Response:
1. The officer arriving at the scene of a traffic collision will be considered the "primary" officer and will be in charge until directed otherwise by a supervisor.
 2. As the "primary" officer he/she should do the following:
 - a. Advise Communications (Dispatch) of:
 - 1) Exact location of traffic collision;
 - 2) Number of vehicles involved;
 - 3) Injury or non-injury/number of persons injured;
 - 4) If there is a need for emergency services (fire/paramedics); and
 - 5) If additional police units are needed to assist in caring for injured parties.
 - b. Secure the scene, preserve evidence, and prevent other vehicles from becoming involved in the collision scene.
 - c. Identify injured parties:
 - 1) Provide extent of injuries to communications (this information is often supplied to responding emergency units);

- 2) Administer emergency medical care (basic life support) until paramedic or other rescue staff(s) arrives, if needed;
 - 3) On non-injury collisions, officers will be dispatched to the scene, both on campus property and on the perimeter, to determine if paramedics will be needed and will advise Communications of the situation.
- d. Identify any fire hazards and/or hazardous materials:
- 1) On collisions involving any fire hazard or actual fire, any officer arriving prior to the fire department should make every effort to handle initial fire suppression.
 - 2) The initial fire suppression efforts will be limited to utilizing fire suppression equipment that is readily available (i.e., fire extinguisher, blankets, garden hoses, etc.).
 - 3) The officer will be responsible for advising Communications that fire department services are needed and will direct other responding police units to appropriate locations for evacuation or traffic control.
- e. Address disturbances between involved parties. Request additional resources to assist in maintaining the peace if needed.
- f. Collect and record information:
- 1) Mark position of vehicles and move vehicles out of the roadway as soon as practicable;
 - 2) Locate and identify drivers and passengers of all vehicles involved, as well as witnesses to the collision;
 - 3) Attempt to prevent drivers, passengers, or other witnesses from collaborating on stories before statements can be taken;
 - 4) Investigate the traffic collision and attempt to determine the contributing factors;
 - 5) Collect and preserve evidence;
 - 6) Interview involved parties and witnesses and secure necessary identity/address information, including telephone numbers;
 - 7) Provide involved parties with a Traffic Accident Information card if parties need to exchange information or need information on obtaining a report (refer to appendix C);
 - 8) Examine and record vehicle damage - Officers may utilize field notes for recording information at the collision scene. However, officers are encouraged to record damage whenever practical via photography and book photos as evidence;

- 9) Examine and record effects of the collision on the roadway or off of the roadway on other property, structures, etc.
 - 10) Take measurements as appropriate - Measurements should be taken from fixed locations that can offer revisiting if necessary. These locations can include curb lines, fire hydrants, utility poles and buildings (avoid using fences, trees, other vehicles or any object that is more likely or able to be moved or altered);
 - 11) Assist in the exchange of information among involved parties;
 - 12) Take photographs as appropriate - Photographs should note damage and any other evidence at the scene and should depict the landmark(s) indicated in the diagram.
- g. Protect the collision scene:
- 1) Secure the scene with fixed barricades, cones, and additional personnel as needed;
 - 2) Ensure evidence is not destroyed or removed;
 - 3) Document the scene within the written collision report;
 - 4) Provide traffic control that includes safe and effective diversion around the collision scene.
- h. Expedite removal of persons, vehicles and debris from roadway that pose a hazard.
- i. Control property belonging to involved parties:
- 1) Any property belonging to involved parties will be protected from theft or damage and if victims are not present, should be brought to the police department, where it is to be inventoried, logged and secured for safekeeping until the owner or his/her designee can arrive to claim it.
 - 2) Involved parties' vehicles will be removed by a tow service of the involved parties' choice or by contract with the police department. Any vehicle that is impounded/stored will be inventoried by a police officer, and particularly valuable items will be removed and kept for safekeeping at the police department until the owner or his/her designee can arrive to claim them.
 - 3) Request towing services for vehicles with damage to the extent that towing is required or if a driver requests services.
3. When the department receives notification of collisions with injuries, officers will be dispatched to respond if the collision is within the jurisdictional boundaries or around the perimeter of the university.
- E. General Collision Response, Reporting and Investigation:

1. Death and injury collisions
 - a. These collisions have the highest priority.
 - b. An investigation and written report shall be completed and the collision thoroughly investigated.
 - c. Investigation assistance can be provided, with supervisory approval, from the California Highway Patrol, the Los Angeles Police Department or other agency that is deemed appropriate.
 - d. Notification of the Chief of Police, the Deputy Chief, and the Captain of Special Services will be made as soon as possible if an investigation is required, and the collision involves serious bodily injury or death.
 - e. A complaint of pain, with no visible injuries, requires a complete investigation.
 - f. Collisions resulting in death (Notification procedures):
 - 1) The Chief of Police or designee will conduct death notification(s) of all persons who are California State University, Northridge students, faculty or staff.
 - 2) Notification for parties not affiliated with California State University, Northridge will be conducted by the investigating agency (California State University, Northridge Police, California Highway Patrol, or the Los Angeles Police Department).
2. Property damage only (PDO) collisions
 - a. PDO collisions shall be documented by the use of a California State University, Northridge Traffic Accident Information card, completed by the officer and provided to the involved parties.
 - c. A traffic collision investigation or report is required for PDO collisions that involve California State University, Northridge property.
 - d. Officers will not encourage the parties to exchange information in lieu of completing the appropriate reports.
 - e. Officers' responsibilities at the scene of a PDO collision include:
 - 1) Traffic control;
 - 2) Clear the roadway;
 - 3) Assist involved parties with the exchange of correct information; and
 - 4) Advise Communications of parties involved, information which will be entered into RIMS.

3. Hit-and-run collisions
 - a. These collisions shall require a written report whenever a victim requests one regardless of the amount of damage. An officer shall complete:
 - 1) An INVESTIGATION when there is evidence likely to lead to the identification and prosecution of the responsible party; and
 - 2) A REPORT, when little or no evidence exists that would aid in the identification and prosecution of the responsible party.
 - b. A hit-and-run vehicle must be impounded as evidence in the following situations:
 - 1) Felony hit-and-run;
 - 2) Misdemeanor hit-and-run, when the vehicle is abandoned; and
 - 3) Hit-and-run when evidence collection at the scene is hampered due to any circumstances requiring removal of the vehicle or for further investigation.
 - c. Pursuant to California Vehicle Code Section 22655(a), an officer may remove a vehicle from the highway or from public or private property for the purpose of inspection if the operator has failed to stop and comply with the provisions of California Vehicle Code sections 20002 to 20006.
 - d. Pursuant to California Vehicle Code section 22655(b), the vehicle shall be released upon the expiration of 48 hours after such removal from the highway or private property, upon demand of the owner. When determining the 48 hour period, weekends and holidays shall be excluded.
4. Driving while under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs
 - a. A written collision report shall be completed on any collision in which it is determined that an operator was under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs, no matter to what degree and regardless of fault.
 - b. Refer to Policy/Procedure Number 07-L.E.-004, Traffic Enforcement, Section IV-C (Operation of a Vehicle by a Driver under the Influence of Alcohol/Drugs), for further guidelines.
5. Hazardous Materials
 - a. Reports shall be written on all hazardous materials collisions. The report will include the response, any medical attention required, and any clean-up that was facilitated.
 - b. Traffic collisions involving hazardous materials may require special units or special expertise. If a police officer determines that the situation involves hazardous material, the Los Angeles Fire Department's Hazardous Materials Unit should be notified.

- c. If a hazard does exist, responding officers should approach from an upwind direction, if possible, and will assess the situation and take the following action:
 - 1) Immediately establish an incident command post and notify communications of its location;
 - 2) Advise Communications to contact Environmental Health and Safety Department for all on-campus incidents;
 - 3) Attempt to isolate the hazardous area and evacuate non-essential personnel;
 - 4) Provide first-aid assistance, if needed;
 - 5) Coordinate traffic control/re-routing and crowd control;
 - 6) Request additional personnel and public services, as needed;
 - 7) Isolate as large of an area as possible until the hazard danger is fully known; and
 - 8) The investigating officer should attempt to identify hazardous material by questioning the driver, checking the bill of lading, placard identification on the vehicle, or placard identification on the material. **DO NOT ENTER THE EVACUATED AREA TO OBTAIN THIS INFORMATION**, wait for properly trained and equipped personnel to respond.
 - d. Personnel at the scene will relay all known information to Communications, which will disseminate it to other responding police units/agencies (Los Angeles Fire Department, Los Angeles County Health Department, California Highway Patrol and any other designated special services), as needed.
6. Private property collisions
- a. As a general rule, California State University, Northridge Police do not take traffic collision reports that occur on private property.
 - b. Officers will respond when requested to collisions on private property and investigate those cases if requested by a surrounding jurisdiction, or any other law enforcement agency that would normally have jurisdiction over that private property.
 - c. In these cases, mutual aid protocol would provide for the response and completion of the requested assistance. Such requests shall be approved by the shift's Patrol Commander. In the absence of the patrol commander, the on-duty shift supervisor shall make the approval. In all cases the Chief of Police shall be notified via the chain of command.
7. Collisions involving disturbances between involved parties
- a. Officers will be dispatched and will respond to the scene of any collision

where there is a disturbance or disagreement between parties involved in the collision.

- b. When possible, two officers will be dispatched to this type of call. The responding officers will separate the involved parties and conduct a preliminary investigation.
 - c. These incidents will be handled as any other call where individuals are in conflict with each other. A report will be written on these cases if the parties request it, or if any of the other criteria for reporting collisions is met.
- F. Stabilization of the Scene - After the collision scene has been stabilized and all urgent information has been obtained, the officer should:
1. Determine whether there is sufficient proof to recommend prosecution or make an arrest;
 2. Supervise clean-up of the collision scene and if a hazard exists, have the proper agency notified to remove or repair the hazard;
 3. Complete the appropriate collision report forms.
- G. Enforcement action at the scene of a traffic collision:
1. Investigations at a collision scene will normally result in detection of evidence necessary to support an arrest, issuance of a citation, or request that a complaint be issued for violation of the law. Upon determination of a violation of traffic law(s) or local ordinance, the officer will take appropriate enforcement action.
 2. If the violation is sustained and is an arrestable California Vehicle/Penal Code violation, officers may make a physical arrest, subject to appropriate California Vehicle/Penal Code procedures.
 3. If the violation occurs and the officer has completed the training program referenced in California Vehicle Code section 40600, a citation may be issued at the traffic collision location as outlined in the department's Traffic Enforcement Policy, Policy/Procedure Number 07-L.E.-004, Section IV.3 (Citations). Procedures for arrest and issuance of citations are outlined in California Vehicle Code Division 17, Chapter 2.
 4. If an officer recommends that a complaint be issued alleging a violation of a vehicle code section, he/she may make a request for review, which will be forwarded to the Los Angeles City Attorney or Los Angeles County District Attorney's office for filing consideration.
 5. If an investigating officer witnesses a collision or violation, the officer may issue a citation at the scene. The violator is given the yellow copy of the citation and the remaining copies are attached to the collision report that is submitted for processing. The officer will record the issuance of the citation and citation number in the recommendations area on the collision form.
- H. School bus and public/mass transportation collisions:
1. The California Highway Patrol investigates school bus collisions only when the

bus is transporting school pupils. This includes instances of a pupil leaving or approaching the bus or crossing the road while the bus has its flashing red lights activated.

2. The Los Angeles Police Department investigates public/mass transportation collisions only when the bus is transporting patrons or occurs within the Los Angeles City jurisdictional area.
3. Other collisions involving school buses or public/mass transportation, which occur on California State University, Northridge property, where there are no students or patrons aboard, and/or the students/patrons are beyond the control of the bus, are handled by the CSUN Department of Police Services.

I. Collision investigation follow up activities include:

1. Collecting off-scene data, such as responding to the hospital to conduct follow-up on any injured parties who were transported;
2. Obtaining statements from witnesses if they were unavailable and if the facts of causation are in dispute or unknown;
3. Reconstruction of collisions involving serious injury or death should be referred to Los Angeles Police Department Valley Traffic Division or the California Highway Patrol.
4. In a serious collision involving severe injuries, fatalities, multiple vehicles, etc., it may be necessary to summon expert or technical assistance from photographers, surveyors, mechanics, physicians, collision team specialists or other specialists. Such expert assistance shall be requested and coordinated by the shift supervisor, and shall be initially requested through the Los Angeles Police Department Valley Traffic Division or the California Highway Patrol.
5. Preparing collision and offense reports to support criminal prosecution.

J. Traffic Collision Report Approval

Traffic collision reports completed by officers of this department shall be reviewed and approved by a qualified supervisor from the Traffic Safety Unit. If a supervisor from the Traffic Safety Unit is not available the officer's Patrol Operation Commander, or designee in their absence, shall review and approve the report.