

# **COVINGTON POLICE DEPARTMENT STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE**

**Subject: TRAFFIC ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION**

**Date of Issue: 01-01-1999**

**Number of Pages: 5**

**Policy No. P170**

**Review Date: 06-01-2007**

**Distribution: Departmental**

**Revision Date: 01-14-2016**

## **I. Purpose**

To establish guidelines to ensure that information concerning traffic accidents is properly reported and recorded.

## **II. Statement of Policy**

It shall be the policy of the Covington Police Department for officers to respond to and investigate all traffic accidents that occur within the corporate limits of the City of Covington. The investigation of traffic accidents is necessary, not only to determine traffic law violations, but also to protect the rights of the individuals involved, to obtain engineering data and to assist in traffic education.

## **III. Traffic Accident Response and Investigation**

A. When notified that an accident has occurred, the dispatcher shall obtain the following information and record it on the dispatch log.

1. Location of accident;
2. Injuries, if any;
3. Is roadway blocked;
4. Types of vehicles involved (dangerous cargoes, etc.);
5. Existing hazards (fire, explosives, etc.);
6. Caller's name;
7. Phone number of the caller.

B. Officer's response to the accident scene will be determined by the seriousness of the accident. Officers shall respond to all accidents involving injury or death with emergency lights and siren. Other accident responses will be non-emergency.

- C. Accident investigation will generally be the responsibility of the unit assigned traffic duty. If no unit is specifically assigned traffic duty or if that unit is unavailable, the zone car will be dispatched.
- D. An accident investigation will be turned over to the unit assigned traffic duties, if available, upon his arrival. That officer shall be responsible for completing all reports. If a traffic unit is unavailable, the zone patrol officer will be responsible for the reports. If the zone officer is unavailable, the first officer on the scene shall be responsible for the reports.
- E. Notify GADOT on all serious injury or fatality accidents occurring on state routes.

#### **IV. Duties of First Officer to Arrive at an Accident Scene**

- A. Officers responding to the scene of an accident will drive in a safe manner so as not to endanger themselves or the public. The first officer on the accident scene will take the following action:
  - 1. Place patrol vehicle in a manner to protect the accident scene.
  - 2. Search for injured. Administer first aid/CPR until emergency medical units arrive, based on training. If injuries are involved, the officer will also advise the dispatcher of the following patient information: complaint, approximate age, conscious (yes or no, alert?), breathing (yes or no, difficulty?), and if there is uncontrolled bleeding.
  - 3. Summon additional assistance.
  - 4. Protect the scene from bystanders or sightseers.
  - 5. Establish traffic patterns around the scene; and or respond to major traffic congestion as a result of the accident.
  - 6. Locate persons involved in the accident.
  - 7. Locate witnesses.

#### **B. Fire Hazards**

Whenever a fire hazard exists, the first officer shall take immediate action to clear the area of all persons and shall notify Communications for the assistance of fire department personnel. The officer shall summon additional police assistance to make a perimeter around the accident scene.

#### **C. Hazardous Materials**

Each patrol vehicle will have a hazardous material booklet in each vehicle. In the event of a train derailment or traffic accident suspected to involve hazardous materials, the responding officer shall immediately:

- 1. Notify Communications Center for assistance from the fire department.
- 2. Notify supervisor to proceed to scene.
- 3. Evacuate the area near the accident scene.

4. Request additional police assistance to establish a perimeter around the scene.

When approaching the scene of an accident involving any cargo:

1. Do not walk into or touch any spilled material
2. Avoid inhalation of all gases, fumes and smoke, even if it is believed that no hazardous materials are involved.
3. Do not assume that gases or vapors are harmless because of a lack of smell.

Supervisors shall establish a command post near the accident scene and shall coordinate activities according to the Disaster Plan (SOP E030). [E030- Disaster Plan.doc](#)

#### D. Serious Injury or Death

1. An accident scene involving serious injury or death should be treated as any other crime scene. Responding officers should ensure the scene is protected from contamination as much as is possible. If necessary, traffic should be diverted until the evidence has been processed and the on-scene investigation is completed.
2. If the investigating officer has probable cause to believe that any of the drivers are under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol, the officer should read the Implied Consent Warning and designate a blood test, especially if the driver in question has been injured. Hough v. State, S05G0311, 10/03/05.
3. If the driver, passenger, or any other person involved in the accident has sustained serious injuries as defined in O.C.G.A. §40-5-55(c), the driver does not have to be under arrest for Implied Consent to be read. If the driver does not have any serious injuries based on the state law, then the driver must be under arrest before Implied Consent is read.
4. Under O.C.G.A. §40-5-55(c), the term "traffic accident resulting in serious injuries or fatalities" means any motor vehicle accident in which a person was killed or in which one or more persons suffered a **fractured bone, severe burns, disfigurement, dismemberment, partial or total loss of sight or hearing, or loss of consciousness.**

#### V. Duties of Investigating Officer

- A. The investigating officer shall properly record any accident that occurs on a public highway, road or street within the city limits with the Georgia Electronic Accident Reporting System (GEARS).
- B. Accidents occurring on private property shall be properly reported as a private property accident within GEARS. All accident reports shall be read and approved by the patrol supervisor.
- C. The investigating officer shall be responsible for the following on-scene duties:
  1. Interviewing principals and witnesses.

2. Examining and recording vehicle damage.
  3. Recording accident information.
  4. Determining damage to roadway or roadway structures, if any.
  5. Recording property damage to other property.
  6. Taking measurements, when appropriate.
  7. Taking photographs, when appropriate.
  8. Collecting and preserving evidence.
  9. Clearing the roadway for the resumption of vehicular traffic and removing vehicles that cannot be driven due to damage.
  10. Exchanging information among parties involved.
  11. Complete the accident checklist.
  12. Control any verbal or physical disturbances between the principals.
- D. Follow up activities may be conducted away from the accident scene after normal flow of traffic is resumed. The investigating officer shall be responsible for follow up investigations on accidents, as necessary. Follow up activities include:
1. Collecting off-scene data to include locating hit and run vehicles, talking to other witnesses who are not present at the scene, etc.
  2. Obtaining and recording witnesses statements.
  3. Reconstructing accidents to include making test skids, measurements, etc.
  4. Completion of the accident report and an incident report, if necessary, to support criminal charges arising from the accident.
- E. Expert or technical assistance may be requested from the Georgia State Patrol or others if the accident involves a fatality or serious injury. Expert/technical assistance will be authorized only by the patrol supervisor or higher authority. Such assistance may include:
1. Professional photography.
  2. Surveyors.
  3. Mechanics.
  4. Physicists.
  5. Physician.

All reports will be included in the investigating officer's report.

- F. The investigating officer shall be authorized to issue a citation(s) for any violation that resulted in a traffic accident. Officers should take enforcement action whenever they detect a violation of law or ordinance and such violation was the proximate cause of the accident.
- G. The investigating officer shall be authorized to remove any valuable property from the vehicles being towed if the persons involved are unable to care for it and shall take property to the police department for safe keeping. The property shall be noted in the property log and may be released to the owner. The officer shall notify the owner and advise of the location of the removed property.

***This SOP supersedes any SOP previously issued.***

BY ORDER OF THE CHIEF OF POLICE:

*Stacey L. Cotton*

Stacey L. Cotton  
Chief of Police