

Cobb County Police Department

Policy 5.20

TRAFFIC CRASHES AND OTHER ROAD HAZARDS

Effective Date: January 12, 2013
Rescinds: Policy 5.20 (August 8, 2010)
Related Orders: Policy 5.01 “Call and Incident Response;” Policy 5.21 “Vehicle Impounds”
Issued By: Chief J.R. Houser Page 1 of 7
The words “he, his, him,” which may appear in this policy, are used generically for clarity and ease of reading. These terms are not meant to imply gender and relate to all employees of the Department.

The purpose of this policy is to establish general guidelines for the Department’s traffic crash reporting and investigation practices and the handling of road hazards. All uniformed members of the Department, when in marked police vehicles, will have the responsibility of assisting motorists in traffic related matters.

I. TRAFFIC CRASHES

Traffic crash investigation determines the causative factors involved in automobile crashes and utilizes these factors to develop enforcement that will reduce the incidence of crashes.

A. Traffic Crash Reporting

Officers will respond to the scene of and investigate all traffic crashes occurring on public or private property, to include the following:

- Death or injury;
 - Hit and run;
 - Impairment due to alcohol or drugs;
 - Damage to public vehicles or property;
 - Hazardous materials;
 - Disturbances between principals;
 - Major traffic congestion as a result of the collision;
 - Damage to vehicles to the extent towing is required;
1. The Georgia Uniform Motor Vehicle Accident Report Form will be completed on all reported traffic crashes that occur on public property. Detailed instructions for preparing the report are contained in the Georgia Uniform Vehicle Accident Report Instruction Guide.
 2. In cases of private property traffic crashes, a Private Property Accident

Report will be used.

3. Any traffic crash reported more than 24 hours after the actual occurrence should be completed on an incident report.

B. General Investigation

1. The officer assigned to the traffic crash shall normally be responsible for the investigation and any follow-up investigation/information needed. Investigation and follow-up will be conducted in accordance with Policy 5.01 “Call and Incident Response.”
2. All officers assigned to the traffic crash should protect the crash scene and preserve short-lived evidence (broken parts, skid marks, etc.).
3. In case of injuries, persons trapped in vehicles, etc., Fire/EMS should be immediately notified. Officers should administer emergency care (basic life support measures) and fire suppression pending arrival of Fire/EMS.
4. Any police officer arriving at the scene of a traffic crash where there is indication of fire, or a hazardous material that may have been released, will immediately request the services of the Fire Department. Officers will not attempt to enter areas where there will be a known hazardous material exposure. The Fire Chief or his designee will assume control of any scene involving fire or hazardous materials and police officers will provide support as required. Traffic crash investigation will start upon release of the scene by the Fire Department.
5. Traffic flow should be established as soon as possible after the injured are cared for. If vehicles are creating a hazard and cannot be removed from the roadway, the officer may need to manually direct traffic around the scene or call for sufficient personnel to handle traffic direction.
6. Officers will interview drivers and witnesses and collect the pertinent information required to complete the Georgia Motor Vehicle Accident Report. Officers will also examine and record vehicle damage and effects on the roadway noting the position of all vehicles. Any evidence found will be collected as needed.
7. Any property belonging to traffic crash victims will be protected from theft and pilferage and, if victims are not present, will be inventoried in accordance with Policy 5.21 “Vehicle Impounds.”
8. Enforcement action should be taken when the officer has detected a violation of a traffic law and when evidence exists to satisfy all the elements of that particular violation. An officer may also choose to take enforcement action

on any other violation discovered during the traffic crash investigation.

C. Hit-and-Run Traffic Crashes

1. Hit-and-run traffic crashes, depending upon the severity or depth of investigation needed, can be investigated by the initial responding officer, or forwarded to the Hit-and-Run Unit for investigation.
2. Whenever a hit-and-run case is turned in for investigation, all pertinent facts and follow-up driver/witness information should be documented for use by the investigator.
3. Technically, a hit-and-run traffic crash is investigated using the same basic steps as listed for general traffic crash investigations.
4. All physical evidence that might lead to a description of the vehicle, or the identification of the driver of a vehicle, should be gathered and turned into the evidence unit.
5. If possible, photographs should be taken of the crash scene and the vehicles involved. Photographs should be packaged and handled the same as any other piece of physical evidence.

D. Fatality and Serious Injury Traffic Crashes

In serious traffic crashes involving near death injuries or fatalities, it is necessary to summon the expert and technical assistance of the STEP Unit. Such assistance will be requested through a supervisor. As a matter of policy, the STEP Unit will respond to and investigate all confirmed fatality traffic crashes.

The investigation and reporting of fatality traffic crashes should be handled in the following manner.

1. The first officer on the scene will notify his supervisor, who will respond to the scene.
2. Upon arrival the supervisor will assume responsibility and control of the scene and request the STEP Unit to respond.
3. Upon arrival of the STEP Unit, complete control of the crash scene will be relinquished to the STEP Unit to conduct the investigation. The STEP Unit will complete any applicable reports required. The officer receiving the call or officer(s) designated by a supervisor will assist the STEP Unit as needed.
4. The on-scene officers will not alter the crash scene or move any evidence unless absolutely necessary to administer first aid or rescue.

5. Either an officer or EMT shall examine immediately the licenses of victims to determine organ donor status. If the victim(s) are organ donors, appropriate action will be taken to ensure, if possible, said organs are not imperiled by delay in verification by the donor's next of kin (OCGA 17-6-11(b.1)).

II. ASSISTANCE TO MOTORISTS

The Department will offer reasonable assistance at all times to the motorist who appears to be in need of aid. Officers should freely provide information and directions upon request. In an effort to better serve the citizens, officers should not only become familiar with the streets and services of their County, but also the various services and facilities in the area. To that end, the following procedures will apply:

- A. Requests for information, directions or assistance will be handled as a normal function of a Department member's duties.
- B. Personnel who observe motorists stranded on the highways will lend assistance unless otherwise committed to a higher priority assignment. In lending assistance, officers are authorized to transport stranded citizens to nearby service facilities or a telephone to summon aid.
- C. In cases of mechanical failure, if the citizen cannot obtain aid from private resources in a reasonable amount of time and the vehicle is a traffic hazard, the contract wrecker service will be called to remove the vehicle. The officer will remain with any vehicle which presents a traffic hazard until it is removed from the roadway.
- D. Officers should attempt to assist motorists stranded or disabled in hazardous locations or environments as soon as possible.
- E. Officers will render all practical assistance to users of the roadway who are involved in emergency situations. Upon discovery of a medical emergency, the officer will request Fire/EMS and render first aid until they arrive.
- F. The State of Georgia Department of Transportation maintains the Highway Emergency Response Operations (HERO) units. HERO units generally operate on the interstate system in Cobb County. They have equipment to effect minor repairs of vehicles and can assist in traffic direction and control. Officers may request that the Cobb 911 Center contact a HERO unit for motorist assistance.

III. ROAD HAZARDS

The following procedure will be followed in identifying, reporting and correcting hazardous roadway, roadside, or environmental conditions:

- A. When an officer identifies a hazard which requires immediate correction, he will

immediately inform the 911 Communications Center of this situation and identify the assistance or special equipment required. The officer should attempt to protect the scene and bystanders when practical. If the officer can correct the situation he should take appropriate action.

- B.** When a hazard is detected that represents a potential traffic crash situation but the threat of such is not imminent, the officer will notify the Communications Center. The Communications Center will notify the proper authority to have the situation corrected. If the officer can correct the situation he should take appropriate action.

IV. TRAFFIC ENGINEERING

A. Complaints and Suggestions

Complaints or suggestions in regard to traffic engineering deficiencies should be referred to the appropriate state or county Department of Transportation. Officers locating deficiencies that pose an immediate danger should have the Communications Center contact the DOT for an immediate response and standby until they arrive, when practical.

B. High Traffic Crash Areas

The traffic crash and enforcement database will be available to the Cobb County DOT for the compiling of statistical data. This data will be used for the analysis of traffic crashes, the directing of enforcement efforts, and traffic engineering solutions. The S.T.E.P. Unit will work in conjunction with the Cobb County DOT to help locate and remedy any factors that might be responsible for traffic crashes in high traffic crash areas.

V. TRAFFIC DIRECTION AND CONTROL

Traffic direction and control may be necessary to facilitate the safe and efficient movement of vehicles and pedestrians. Officers should only be assigned to these duties when practical and where police authority and/or human intervention is required, and only until such time that the problem is resolved. Conditions which may dictate the manual control of traffic and traffic control devices include, but are not limited to:

- The scenes of traffic crashes;
- The scenes of fires or other critical incidents (firefighters might also be utilized);
- During periods of adverse road and weather conditions;
- Malfunctioning traffic signals;
- Road construction; and
- Special events and functions.

In order to establish uniform procedures for the provision of traffic direction and control, the following policies will be adhered to:

A. Hand Signals and Gestures

Officers will use those hand signals and gestures to direct traffic as authorized by the Georgia Peace Officer's Reference Text and taught by the Cobb County Department of Public Safety Training Center.

B. High Visibility Equipment

Officers will wear their issued high-visibility equipment at all times when directing traffic or conducting activities in a roadway. Necessary equipment consists of:

1. Reflective vest or raincoat with reflective side visible to motorists
2. Flashlight, for use during low-light conditions

EXCEPTION: An exception to the above will be made when conducting routine traffic stops, when engaged in the pursuit or apprehension of a suspect, or when the urgency of the situation requires that first responder officers immediately administer first aid, relieve congested traffic, or secure the scene. As soon as the emergency situation stabilizes, or assistance arrives on the scene, the officer must put on his visibility equipment.

C. Traffic Control at Fire Scenes or Other Critical Incidents

1. Officers engaged in traffic direction and control services at fire scenes or other critical incidents will facilitate ingress and egress from the scene by emergency vehicles.
2. No vehicles will be allowed to cross fire hoses without the approval of the senior fire official on the scene.
3. Parked vehicles which interfere with incident operations may be towed as needed.

D. Traffic Control during Adverse Road and Weather Conditions

1. The supervisor will request Communications Center operators to notify the local radio stations, public works, Fire Department, and other public safety agencies of adverse road conditions that will affect the motoring public.
2. When practical, Department personnel should provide traffic direction and control at the scene of downed power lines, broken gas lines and water mains, or construction sites when the lack of traffic control would endanger the safe movement of traffic through the area.
3. The officer may close a street if the surface conditions and terrain create an

unusually hazardous condition. The supervisor should request assistance from the proper agency in alleviating the problem, and request public service radio announcements be made in reference to the closure. Other public safety agencies will also be notified.

E. Traffic Control Devices

1. Temporary traffic control devices such as cones, barricades, etc., may be obtained from the Cobb County Department of Transportation (DOT) for special events or emergency situations. Supervisors may request these devices and determine the location for using them.
2. Temporary devices will be removed when the event or emergency situation is over and will be returned to the DOT.
3. Normally, officers will not manually operate traffic signals. A supervisor may, however, approve the manual operation of traffic signal if he believes the circumstances warrant it (special events, unusual occurrences, etc). When necessary, DOT will be contacted for assistance.