

GENERAL ORDER

G.O. 7-612

SUBJECT: TRAFFIC ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION



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I. PURPOSE AND RESPONSIBILITY:

- A. Purpose: To set the policy and establish the procedures for traffic accident investigations at the Monroe Police Department.
- B. Responsibility:
 - 1. It will be the responsibility of officers assigned to the Patrol Division (PD) of this Department to investigate all reported motor vehicle accidents, with specialized assistance from the Support Services Division (SSD) for the more serious accidents.
 - 2. It will be the responsibility of the patrol officer assigned to investigate a motor vehicle traffic accident, having visible property damage and/or personal injury, to report the necessary information on the State of Connecticut Police Accident Report form (PR-1 Revised 12-94).

II. DISCUSSION:

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- A. This general order deals with traffic accident investigations including providing emergency assistance to the injured, protecting the accident scene, conducting at-scene and follow-up investigations, preparing reports, and taking proper enforcement action relative to the incident.

III. DEFINITIONS:

- A. ACCIDENT RECONSTRUCTIONIST: An officer that has successfully completed specialized training from a recognized training program.
- B. DEP: The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection.
- C. TRAFFIC ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION: A collection of factual information identifying and describing people, roads, and vehicles involved in an accident; describing the results of the accident 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 accident.
- D. TRAFFIC ACCIDENT REPORTING: Basic data collection to identify and classify a traffic accident and the persons, vehicles, time/location, planned movements involved, and possible contributing factors, such as traffic law violations.

IV. POLICY:

- A. It will be the policy of the Monroe Police Department that officers dispatched to motor vehicle traffic accidents should investigate and report the accident in a thorough and professional manner.
- B. It will be the policy of the Monroe Police Department that the first responding officer at the scene of a motor vehicle traffic accident will assess, prioritize, and then act on those priorities.
- C. It will be the policy of the Monroe Police Department that officers will assume the responsibility for all situations at motor vehicle traffic accident scenes until properly relieved of that responsibility by another agency, such as the Fire Department, DEP,

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etc.

V. **PROCEDURES:**

A. **ACCIDENT REPORT/INVESTIGATION:** Non-injury and minor injury motor vehicle traffic accidents generally require the reporting of basic information required on the standard State of Connecticut Police Accident Report form (PR-1, Revised 12-94). A more thorough investigation and a Department incident report is also required for accidents that involve:

1. Death or serious injury;
2. Extensive property damage;
3. Evading responsibility (hit and run);
4. Impairment of the operator due to alcohol and/or drugs;
5. Hazardous materials; and
6. Occurrences on private property (personal injury and/or extensive property damage).

B. **PATROL RESPONSE:** One or more patrol officers should be dispatched to the scene of a serious or complex motor vehicle traffic accident to provide emergency services, investigate the accident, record short-lived evidence, and restore the normal flow of traffic. In less serious accidents, officer response should be influenced by the workload and by the availability of officers. The following are procedures for police response:

1. **DISPATCH:** Communications Unit dispatchers will dispatch officers to all motor vehicle traffic accidents involving:
 - a. Death or injury;
 - b. Evading Responsibility;
 - c. Impairment of an operator due to alcohol or drugs;

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- d. Damage to any government vehicle or property;
 - e. Hazardous materials;
 - f. Disturbance between principals;
 - g. Major traffic congestion as a result of the accident; or
 - h. Damage to vehicles to the extent towing is required.
2. RESPONSE: Officers should respond to dispatched traffic accidents according to the established response codes. Refer to General Order 5-412, Response Codes:
- a. Code One: When there is property damage only and the persons and vehicles involved are not in a hazardous position on the roadway;
 - b. Code Two: When there is a need to get to the scene relatively quickly due to injuries or the hazard potential for an escalation of greater injuries;
 - c. Code Three: When there is a probability that a human life is in danger, a real danger not imagined, not assumed, by the nature of the call.
3. SUSPENSION OF PROCEDURE: During inclement weather and extremely poor road conditions, and when patrol units are overly taxed, the investigating and reporting of non-injury, minor property damage accidents, will be suspended. Communications Unit dispatchers will respond to citizens' requests by informing them of this suspension of normal procedures and by instructing them to exchange the necessary information on their own. The news media will be advised of this suspension when they inquire of road and traffic conditions. This is a temporary measure to be curtailed when officers become more available.
- C. ACCIDENT SCENE RESPONSIBILITIES: The following are procedures at the scene of a traffic accident to establish responsibilities for responding officers:

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1. ACCIDENT SCENE/OFFICER-IN-CHARGE: To ensure that all required tasks are carried out at the scene of an accident, the following procedures for establishing the officer-in-charge are specified:
 - a. Less than Serious Accident: Unless otherwise directed, the patrol officer assigned to the district within which the accident occurred will have investigative/reporting responsibility. The officer assigned the investigative/reporting responsibility will be the officer-in-charge at any less than serious accident scene.
 - b. Serious Accident: At the scene of any serious accident the procedures to specify the officer-in-charge are elaborated in General Order 2-111, Organization; paragraph V, subparagraph B, section 3, titled "Command Protocol;"
 - c. Very Serious Accident: An accident re-constructionist will be assigned as an expert technician and will assist in the investigation of the fatal or potentially fatal accidents, and where municipal interests are at risk. If this type of motor vehicle traffic accident occurs, and an accident re-constructionist is not on duty, the PD Commander or the Shift Commander may authorize a call in to duty. Photographs will be taken for this type motor vehicle traffic accident.
 - d. Accident Involving Department Vehicles: A PD supervisor will investigate all traffic accidents involving Department owned vehicles. A PD supervisor will investigate all traffic accidents involving vehicles from other law enforcement agencies. The components of the investigation follow the criteria contained in state accident form PR-1. In both cases the Shift Commander will review the investigation, and notify the Chief of Police.
2. ACCIDENT SCENE/IDENTIFYING AND DEALING WITH INJURED PERSONS: The first officers arriving at the scene must:
 - a. Assess the accident scene, summon ambulance(s) and/or additional assistance (e.g., more officers, fire units, medical personnel, utilities, tow trucks, etc.);

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- b. Identify and administer first aid to the injured;
- c. Stabilization: Stabilize, protect the scene from degeneration, and administer basic life support and emergency medical care. Priority will be given to breathing and circulation, which includes severe bleeding, shock, etc. Neck and back injuries are also a foremost priority. No movement of the victim until properly stabilized unless the conditions at the scene become life-threatening to the victim, such as a fire;
- d. Transport Injured:
 - 1. Ambulance: In routine accidents with injuries, an ambulance will be summoned to the scene for the transportation of the injured persons to area hospitals;
 - 2. "Life Star" Medical Helicopter: In certain accidents where injuries are determined to be of a serious nature and rapid transport to an area hospital is imperative the "Life Star" helicopter may be utilized. When the decision has been made by competent medical or emergency personnel at the scene of an accident or other incident to request the services of the "Life Star" helicopter, the following shall apply:
 - aa. Notification: The request for services of "Life Star" will be made by Central Emergency Medical Dispatch (CMED) via telephone (1-800-437-4378). At that time the CMED dispatcher will as fully as possible advise the "Life Star" dispatcher of:
 - 1. Type of accident or other incident;
 - 2. Location of the accident or incident;
 - 3. Number of persons and severity of injuries;
 - 4. Weather conditions at the scene.

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- bb. Communications: Once the decision has been made by "Life Star" to respond, the CMED dispatcher will communicate directly with the "Life Star" helicopter via their common radio frequency.
 - cc. Fire Department: Communications Unit personnel will dispatch personnel of the Fire Department company nearest the scene, advising them of the incident and the call for "Life Star". The Fire Department personnel will have responsibility for the following:
 - 1. Selection and identification of the landing zone;
 - 2. Communication between the scene and "Life Star";
 - 3. Readiness in the event of crash or fire.
 - dd. Police Department: The primary responsibilities officers of this Department have at the scene of an accident or other incident, where the services of "Life Star" have been requested, are:
 - 1. Protection of the scene;
 - 2. Rendering of medical assistance to those in need, if necessary;
 - 3. Investigation of the accident or other incident;
 - 4. Establishing a safe perimeter for the landing and take off of "Life Star";
 - 5. Providing on site security for the "Life Star" craft, if necessary.
3. ACCIDENT SCENE/IDENTIFYING AND DEALING WITH FIRE HAZARDS AND/OR HAZARDOUS MATERIALS:

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- a. Fire Hazards: The Fire Department shall be called immediately if a fire exists or there is an imminent potential for a fire. Gasoline/oil spills, or live wires down and sparking are imminent potentials for a fire. Officers assigned to the scene of an accident with a fire hazard should:
 1. Remove victims from the accident scene and all other non-essential persons in the area should be evacuated;
 2. Isolate the area to prevent unauthorized persons from entering or re-entering the area.
- b. Hazardous Material: All officers should be aware that any traffic accident involving a cargo vehicle is a potential hazardous material incident and the officer should be observant for any evidence of hazardous material, such as placards, etc., before approaching the cargo vehicle. Officers assigned to the scene of an accident with hazardous materials should:
 1. Immediately call for the Fire Department to respond and cause the DEP to be notified;
 2. When there is a question whether spilled material at an accident scene is of a hazardous nature, avoid contact and keep others away from the material;
 3. Stabilize the scene and assist the other responding agencies by controlling motor vehicle and pedestrian traffic.
4. ACCIDENT SCENE/INFORMATION COLLECTION: The investigating/reporting officer will completely and accurately fill out a State of Connecticut Accident Report (PR-1) in all cases where property damage and/or personal injury has occurred. The report will be used by many state, local, and private agencies to plan and coordinate accident prevention programs and will be used to support the prosecution of traffic law violators involved in the accident. The collection of information will include:

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- a. Interviewing the principals and witnesses, obtaining written statements, when appropriate, and listing all occupants and their injuries;
 - b. Examining and recording damage to all vehicles involved;
 - c. Examining and recording the effects of the accident on the roadway or other public or private property;
 - d. Taking measurements;
 - e. Taking photographs, if appropriate;
 - f. Collecting and preserving evidence, if appropriate; and
 - g. Assisting the principals in exchanging information.
5. ACCIDENT SCENE/PROTECTING THE ACCIDENT SCENE: Officers dispatched to the scene of traffic accident are directed to protect the scene. This can be accomplished by:
- a. Parking the police patrol vehicle, with activated emergency lights, in such a manner as to protect the scene and the public;
 - b. Establishing a safe traffic pattern around the scene; and
 - c. Expediting the removal of vehicles, persons, and debris from the roadway.
- D. ACCIDENT FOLLOW-UP INVESTIGATIONS: A follow-up investigation is necessary in serious personal injury accidents or very complicated property damage accidents. The primary responsibility lies with the investigating/reporting officer. There are times when the services of experts are also needed and will be provided. If an accident necessitates further investigation the follow-up will include:
1. Collecting of off-scene data;
 2. Obtaining and recording of witness statements;

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3. Reconstructing accidents, including the inspecting of the vehicle(s) involved for defects; and
 4. Preparing written reports to support any motor vehicle or criminal charges arising from the accident.
- E. ACCIDENT SCENE/PROPERTY CONTROL: All officers at the scene of a traffic accident should ensure that property belonging to accident victims is protected from theft or pilferage if the owner is unable to care for it. Property control procedures:
1. Cash, firearms, or items of substantial value will be tagged and turned over to the Property Control Officer (PCO). Refer to General Order 9-841, Evidence and Property; paragraph V, subparagraph C.
 2. A Department Possessed Property Release Receipt will be completed upon inventory and signed by the owner upon release.
- F. FATAL ACCIDENT NOTIFICATION: For every motor vehicle accident that results in a death, the investigating officer or agency will use all reasonable efforts to identify and notify a member of the deceased person's family or household as soon as practicable after the accident. Refer to General Order 6-551, Section V-B7 for notification procedures. This procedure is in accordance with the "Uniform Policy For Notifications In Death And Related Events" developed by POSTC in September, 2008. The following information will be revealed at the notification:
1. Identity of the deceased person;
 2. The location of the motor vehicle accident;
 3. The location of the deceased person's body.
- G. ACCIDENT CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM: This Department's accident classification system is in conformance with the current edition of the "Manual on Classification of Motor Vehicle Traffic Accidents", as provided by the National Safety Council.