



EMERGENCY OPERATION OF POLICE VEHICLES

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I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this order is to clarify the operation of departmental vehicles in non-pursuit situations.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Iowa City Police Department to ensure that all departmental vehicles are in safe operating condition and that they will be operated in a safe and legal manner. When responding to a call, members will operate vehicles in compliance with State Law and City Ordinances relating to motor vehicle operations.

III. DEFINITIONS

Pursuit Driving: for the purpose of this order, pursuit means chasing a fleeing suspect who is exceeding the posted speed limit or driving in an evasive or unsafe manner [General Order 99-01 *Police Vehicle Pursuits*].

IV. PROCEDURES

Police vehicles responding to calls will be operated in either a routine, urgent or emergency mode. These modes are defined as:

Routine - Non-life threatening or property damage producing incidents. For example, shoplifting incidents, criminal investigation reports (not in progress), loud noise or disturbance calls, requests for service and other non-emergency calls. Routine responses involve no use of either emergency lights or siren. When an officer is operating in a routine mode, he/she shall obey all laws and ordinances pertaining to motor vehicle operations.

Urgent - Immediate response, though there is no imminent threat to life or property. Emergency lights/siren may be used intermittently at the officer's discretion. For example, property damage accident with roadway blocked. Urgent responses may involve the use of emergency lights. Unless emergency lights are activated, the officer shall obey all laws and ordinances pertaining to routine motor vehicle operations.

Emergency (code 3) - An emergency situation exists, and there is an immediate threat to a person or property. The officer should respond with emergency lights and siren. When operating in or responding to an emergency assignment, the following guidelines shall be adhered to. Code 3 responses involve the use of emergency lights and siren. Emergency lights should be used at all times while responding to an emergency assignment.

- A. No unit assigned to an officer shall be driven in such a manner or at such a speed that the officer is unable to safely maintain control of the vehicle.
- B. No unit shall be driven through an intersection which is controlled by an automatic traffic signal when the red light is showing until said unit has slowed to such a speed that they could safely come to a stop. The officer may then proceed with caution only after determining it is safe to do so.
- C. No unit shall be driven through an intersection which is controlled by a stop sign, until the operator has slowed to such a speed that they could safely come to a stop. The officer may proceed after determining it is safe to do so.
- D. Sirens may be used whenever necessary in the judgment of the officer driving the vehicle. (There are many times when the use of a siren is unnecessary and only creates confusion and draws crowds.)

- E. When emergency equipment is deactivated the responding officer shall obey all traffic laws and proceed in a manner consistent with the normal flow of traffic.

Use of Emergency Lights - Emergency lights may be used when, in the opinion of the operating officer, it is necessary to stop violators and/or alert passing or oncoming drivers to dangerous situations such as accident scenes.

Once the need for displaying emergency lights is over, they shall be turned off. In a case where emergency lights are used to stop a violator, they shall be turned off as soon as it is safe to do so. Officers may elect to leave emergency lights activated if vehicles are stopped in a position that might create a hazard and/or if the situation itself is unsafe/unstable.

The use of emergency lights and/or siren is dictated by the particular circumstances of a call. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- A. Responding to a call where there is an immediate threat to person or property.
- B. Stopping a vehicle on the roadway.
- C. At the scene of an accident.
- D. At a traffic control assignment.
- E. At the scene of a hazard or roadway obstruction.

The spotlight is primarily designed for illumination of the interior of stopped vehicles. The spotlight shall not be used for signaling vehicles. When used to illuminate, the spotlight should be positioned so it will not be directed at oncoming traffic.

When responding to an assignment, officers will not operate vehicles at a speed or in such a manner that inhibits his/her ability to control the vehicle. Officers will adhere to the basic rules of traffic safety, regardless of the nature of the assignment. Any officer who is involved in a collision will be required to explain his/her actions. Factors which the officer shall consider in determining the speed at which a police vehicle is operated include but are not limited to:

- A. the officer's ability to control the vehicle;
- B. roadway conditions;
- C. light conditions;
- D. traffic conditions;
- E. nature of the offense or situation;
- F. the danger posed to the public and the officer by the speed of the vehicle.

The ultimate responsibility for the safe operation of a police vehicle is with the operator of the vehicle.

When operating a vehicle in any situation, officers are expected at all times to exercise the highest degree of care.

The operation of a vehicle against traffic on one-way streets or controlled access roadways shall only be performed under the most extreme circumstances and only when specifically authorized to do so by a supervisory officer.

When an officer is notified of an actual or potential emergency situation by other than the communications center, the receiving officer shall report to the communications center the nature and location of the incident. When practical, the name of the person who made the initial notification to the officer should be recorded.

PRIORITIZATION OF CALLS FOR SERVICE

Calls for service received by the Communications Center are assigned a priority category. The priority assigned each call is based upon the urgency of the incident reported, with the highest priority given to life-threatening or potentially life-threatening situations. Calls shall be categorized and dispatched according to the following priorities:

A. Priority 1:

Those calls for service that involve life threatening or potentially life threatening situations are Priority 1 calls. The dispatch of an officer or officers is urgent. If sufficient manpower is unavailable for response, the Emergency Communications Operator (ECO) may call an officer en route to or already on the scene of a call with lesser priority to respond. Examples of Priority 1 calls include but are not limited to; life-threatening medical calls, personal injury crashes, crashes with unknown injuries, officer(s) in need of urgent or emergency assistance, shootings, stabbings, violent domestic dispute calls, and citizens' report of an in-progress crime against a person. Officers responding to Priority 1 calls may respond in an emergency (Code 3) or urgent mode or a combination of both.

B. Priority 2:

Calls for service which may require an element of surprise to apprehend a perpetrator or require a shortened response time are Priority 2 calls. Such calls include but are not limited to: Intrusion or panic alarms, residential alarms or bank alarms when the business is normally open, or reports of felony property crimes in progress. Officers may respond to Priority 2 calls in an emergency (Code 3) or urgent mode, or a combination of both.

C. Priority 3:

All other routine calls for service which require a timely, but non-emergency response are Priority 3 calls. Examples of Priority 3 calls include but are not limited to; reports of past tense incidents where a preliminary investigation is required and a suspect is no longer present, first-aid calls which do not involve life-threatening circumstances, property damage vehicular crashes, person(s) in custody who are not combative. Officers shall respond to Priority 3 calls in a routine mode.

D. Priority 4:

Calls for service which are of such nature that they may be taken when the area car is available. Priority 4 calls include but are not limited to animal complaints and parking problems which pose no traffic hazard. Officers will respond to Priority 4 calls in a routine mode.

UNIT ASSIGNMENT

To the extent possible the nearest available area car will be assigned as the initial unit of a Priority 1 call and will normally respond in either an urgent or emergency (Code 3) mode. The next nearest unit should be assigned as the second unit to the call. Secondary unit(s) should consider responding in a routine mode. However, if the gravity of the situation and/or the distance to be traversed would unnecessarily delay the arrival of the assisting unit(s), the secondary unit(s) may respond in an urgent or emergency (Code 3) mode. In these circumstances, the responding officers must weigh the jeopardy their response presents to themselves and the public. The assisting officer(s) must remain mindful of the fact that other emergency vehicles may be responding to the area in an emergency (Code 3) mode.

To the extent possible, the nearest available area car will be assigned as the initial unit on a Priority 2 call and will normally respond in either an urgent or emergency (Code 3) mode. The next nearest unit should be assigned as the second unit to the call. Secondary unit(s) should consider responding in a routine mode. However, if the gravity of the situation and/or the distance to be traversed would unnecessarily delay the arrival of the assisting unit(s) the officer(s) may elevate their response to urgent or emergency (Code 3).

Priority 3 calls should be assigned to an area car. If the ECO determines that there will not be an area car available in a reasonable amount of time, the ECO may assign an available unit from another area. To the extent possible, the complainant should be advised by the ECO of a timeframe in which a unit will be responding. When circumstances preclude a unit from responding in a reasonable amount of time the ECO may set up a time convenient with the complainant for an officer to respond.

SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Watch supervisors have the responsibility to monitor the use of emergency response(s) by subordinates. Supervisors have the authority to upgrade, downgrade, or terminate the response of a subordinate.

UNMARKED VEHICLES

Operators of unmarked police vehicles should be constantly aware of their reduced visibility and adjust their response and tactics accordingly. While officers in unmarked vehicles may respond to incidents, they should not be assigned as the initial unit on an emergency call. All unmarked vehicles used for traffic enforcement shall be equipped

with emergency lights and siren. Officers operating unmarked vehicles not equipped with emergency lights and/or siren shall obey all laws and ordinances pertaining to motor vehicle operations.

PURSUIT

Officers of the Iowa City Police Department engaged in pursuit shall comply with section 321.231 of the Code of Iowa and will be governed by the Iowa City Police Department General Order # 99-01 Police Vehicle Pursuits.

ESCORTS

Private vehicles or other emergency vehicles (law enforcement, fire department, ambulance service, etc.) shall not be given an escort by a member of this department with the exception of a funeral procession or special event and in those exigent circumstances where the delay involved in an ambulance response to the scene may create a life and death situation.

This section does not preclude officers from guiding "lost" motorists, or providing non-emergency chaperoning for businesses.

OCCUPANT RESTRAINT

All employees of the Iowa City Police Department are required to utilize safety belt devices whenever the employee operates a departmental vehicle and shall comply with Iowa Code 321.445 requiring the use of safety belts on all front seat occupants.

Persons being transported in the back seat of marked patrol cars should be restrained with a safety belt, when they are cooperative and it does not compromise the safety of the officer(s) involved.

Denise Brotherton, Interim Chief of Police

WARNING

This directive is for departmental use only and does not apply in any criminal or civil proceeding. The department policy should not be construed as a creation of a higher legal standard of safety or care in an evidentiary sense with respect to third-party claims. Violations of this directive will only form the basis for departmental administrative sanctions.