

PALM BEACH GARDENS POLICE DEPARTMENT		
TRAFFIC CRASH INVESTIGATION		
POLICY AND PROCEDURE 4.2.3.11		
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PURPOSE: To establish guidelines for the department's traffic crash reporting and investigation practices.

SCOPE: Officers and Police Service Aides

REVIEW RESPONSIBILITY: Patrol Operations Bureau and Records Section

POLICY: The department establishes a traffic operations function to ensure the proper handling of traffic crash reporting and investigation practices. Typically, this extends to the reporting of certain basic information only. For more severe crashes or those involving certain special circumstances, investigative and possibly emergency services are required.

1. CRASH RESPONSE

- a. Crash reporting and investigation will be the primary responsibility of the Traffic Unit. Should Traffic Unit officers not be available, this responsibility will be handled by patrol officers. In any instance, this Department will direct one or more officers, as appropriate, to respond to the scene of any traffic crash reported to involve any of the following:
 - i. Death or injury.
 - ii. Hit and run.
 - iii. Impairment of an operator due to alcohol and/or drugs.
 - iv. Damage to private or public vehicles or property.

- v. Hazardous materials.
- vi. Disturbances between principals.
- vii. Major traffic congestion resulting from the traffic crash.
- viii. Damage to vehicles to the extent towing is required.
- ix. Any crash occurring on any public road or highway within the city limits of Palm Beach Gardens.
 - 1. Crashes occurring on 1-95 or any of its ramps shall be investigated and reported by Florida Highway Patrol, however an officer may respond to stand-by and assist.
- b. In a crash involving death or serious injury, the Traffic Unit will be responsible for the entire investigation.
 - i. Should Traffic Unit officers not be available, the Traffic Sergeant will be notified and a crash investigator will be called in to investigate the crash.
 - ii. The Patrol Operations Bureau Major is to be notified of any crash of this nature.
 - iii. The first officer arriving at the scene will remain in charge until relieved by a supervisor or Traffic Unit officer assigned to crash investigation.
- c. Crashes involving hazardous materials, minor injuries, damage to property, impairment due to alcohol or drugs and/or disabled vehicles will be investigated by Traffic Unit officers when available.
- d. At times when Traffic Unit officers are not available, the crashes will be handled by an officer assigned to Road Patrol.
- e. Hit and run crashes shall be investigated by a Traffic Unit officer.
 - i. The initial report may be completed by an officer assigned to Road Patrol.
 - 1. Initial reports completed by an officer assigned to Road Patrol shall be turned over to the Traffic Unit for follow-up investigation.
- f. Whether the officer responding is patrol or traffic, the officer should evaluate the scene and determine if any additional officer assistance is needed.
 - i. In minor crashes, the officer should attempt to clear the roadway and restore the flow of traffic.
 - ii. If a vehicle is disabled, and the owner states no towing company preference, the officer will, as soon as possible, call for the Department authorized towing agency.
- g. Disturbances between drivers (principals) involved in traffic related crashes shall be first handled by the responding officers(s) in the following manner:
 - i. Separate the parties and determine injuries.
 - ii. Ascertain crash cause and/or reason through observation and questions regarding the disturbance.
 - iii. Use discretion and diplomacy in handling parties involved in a crash.
- h. Any officer who witnesses a motor vehicle traffic crash will notify the Communications Center of the crash and ensure medical assistance is rendered, if required.
 - i. Should the traffic crash occur when the officer is engaged in the pursuit of a motor vehicle and that motor vehicle is involved in a traffic crash that does not include the pursuing officer, then the pursuing officer will investigate the crash and submit the appropriate report.
 - 1. If the pursuit involves a stolen vehicle and the crash involves the stolen vehicle and a fixed object, the incident can be handled by inclusion in the recovery report.

- ii. Any crash that results from the pursuit of a motor vehicle by another agency in this Department's jurisdiction will be investigated by this Department and the appropriate report completed.

2. CRASH REPORTS

- a. Under the requirements of Florida Statutes, a police crash report, or long form report will be completed when the following criteria are met:
 - i. Injury or death.
 - ii. Hit and run in violation of FSS 316.027 or 316.061.
 - iii. DUI in violation of 316.193.
 - iv. Any crash of sufficient severity to require removal of one of the vehicles by a wrecker due to disabling damage.
- b. Crashes involving City (public) owned vehicles will be handled by established state guidelines and procedures set forth on policy [4.2.3.22 – Crashes Involving City Vehicles](#).
- c. Whenever an incident does not meet the requirements for a long-form report, then a short form crash report will be completed by the investigating officer.
- d. On arrival at a crash scene, the officer should determine the extent of the crash, and the appropriate form.
 - i. Each crash report will be assigned a case number, completed and turned in at the end of each shift.
 - ii. Short forms will be completed at the scene and a copy provided to each driver.
- e. A driver wishing to report a delayed crash of more than forty-eight (48) hours with minor damages, may be given a Driver Report of Traffic Crash form that they can complete and mail to Tallahassee.
 - i. The issuing member shall provide information on how to complete such form(s).

3. CRASH FORMS

- a. The Palm Beach Gardens Police Department shall use those traffic crash forms prescribed by the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles.
 - i. The State of Florida provides for revisions and/or updates regarding traffic related forms (i.e., citations, DUI citations, etc.).
- b. The Traffic Unit Sergeant participates in traffic coordinating council meetings regarding traffic direction, devices, and roadway concerns with D.O.T., Palm Beach County Traffic Engineering, and other county agencies.

4. OFFICER RESPONSIBILITIES

- a. Officers responding to the crash scene should choose the best possible approach route; consider traffic flow and congestion problems, based on their knowledge of conditions normally existing in the vicinity.
 - i. Officers should drive safely to the scene, consistent with the need for prompt responses. During approach to the scene, and upon arrival, officers should:
 - 1. Be alert for specific conditions or factors that may have contributed to the crash (such as visibility/view obstruction, inoperative traffic control device, hazards, etc.).
 - 2. Select proper parking position which allows for maximum protection of injured persons, damaged vehicles, traffic hazards, and protection of evidence.

3. Check for injuries; provide first aid or medical attention and arrange for any needed paramedic, fire units or other necessary medical response.
 4. Arrange for a safe pattern of traffic around the crash.
 5. Protect the scene and take precautions to prevent other crashes;
 - a. check for hazards;
 - b. prevent destruction of evidence;
 - c. provide traffic control;
 - d. provide any other assistance needed to handle the crash
 - e. Officers shall also protect the injured and vehicles from theft.
 6. Determine if it is a hit and run (either misdemeanor or felony); locate drivers;
 - a. If it is a hit and run, obtain information on the driver and/or vehicle and relay to communications for broadcast.
 7. Return normal traffic flow as soon as possible.
 8. Arrange for tow vehicle(s) to clear crash scene.
- b. After the crash has been stabilized and all urgent information has been obtained, the officer should:
- i. Determine whether proof of violation is sufficient to issue a citation or make an arrest.
 - ii. Mark skids in case further investigation warrants them.
 - iii. Supervise clean-up of crash scene; and if a hazard exists, have proper agency notified to remove or repair.
 - iv. Complete crash report forms.

5. CHAIN OF COMMAND

- a. The first officer arriving at the scene will:
 - i. Secure the scene.
 - ii. Remain in charge until relieved by a supervisor or Traffic Unit officer assigned to crash investigation.
 - iii. Officer in charge of crash scene will designate specific duties to other officers, provide aid in gathering witnesses and maintain safe traffic flow around crash scene.
 - iv. If a supervisor does not respond to the crash subordinate officers will carry out duties assigned by supervisors.
 - v. Should supervisory officers of both traffic/patrol units arrive at the same time; the traffic supervisor will be in charge.

6. TRAFFIC DIRECTION & CONTROL AT SCENES

- a. Traffic direction and control at scenes will be determined by the originating responding officer.
- b. Officers will use patrol vehicle emergency lights, flares, and other appropriate warning devices.
- c. Scene protection and warning of victims, their vehicles or hazardous debris should be accomplished.
- d. Additional officers will be requested if circumstances dictate.
- e. Public works personnel will be notified if cones or barricades are needed for scene and traffic control.
- f. Traffic should be routed if needed and two lane roadway criteria may be implemented.
- g. Detours or alternate routes should be selected to control traffic flow.
 - i. Flares may be initiated for use to coordinate traffic flow direction.
 - ii. Attention should be provided to four lane roadways where crossovers are utilized to maintain traffic flow when both lanes of a divided roadway are obstructed.

7. CRASH INVESTIGATIONS INVOLVING DEATH OR INJURY**a. Duties of on-scene officers**

- i. When it is evident that death has occurred at the scene of a traffic crash, or the severity of injury is such that death is likely, the officer will notify their immediate supervisor.
 1. Road Patrol supervisors or Communications will notify the Traffic Unit Sergeant.
- ii. All fatality crashes, or possible fatality crashes, will be handled by a Traffic Homicide Investigator (THI).
 1. The on-duty THI is to be notified and will respond to the scene of the crash and take over the investigation.
 2. If a THI is not on-duty, the Road Patrol supervisor will notify dispatch.
 - a. Dispatch will contact the Traffic Sergeant and advise of the situation.
 - b. The Traffic Sergeant will authorize call-out of a THI to handle the investigation.
 - i. In the event the Traffic Sergeant cannot be notified, the Patrol Operations Major will be notified to authorize a THI call-out.
- iii. The officer at the scene of a traffic fatality has two immediate responsibilities; secure the scene and locate witnesses to the crash.
 1. Securing the scene - The officer will be aware of the importance of physical evidence in a crash investigation.
 - a. This importance is greatly magnified in a fatality investigation.
 2. Without interfering with the treatment of the injured or other rescue efforts, the officer will secure the scene of the crash.
 - a. The use of barrier tape, cones and barricades, or police vehicles may be employed to insure that physical evidence is preserved.
 3. Traffic will be re-routed around the scene of the crash.
 - a. If necessary, the road will be closed to traffic and appropriate detour routes selected.
 - b. All attempts to keep other vehicles out of the scene will be made.
 4. Absent exigent circumstances the vehicles, deceased person(s) or other physical evidence should not be moved.
 - a. Officers will not use paint, crayons, or other marking devices to deface the scene prior to the arrival of the THI.
 5. Locating witnesses - The officer will attempt to identify and locate witnesses to the crash.
 - a. The officer will obtain their names, home address and phone number.
 - b. The officer will ask witnesses to remain at the scene until the arrival of the THI.
 - i. If possible, witnesses will be isolated from other bystanders and will be asked to refrain from discussing the crash.

b. Duties of the traffic homicide investigator

- i. Upon arrival at the scene, the THI will assume command of the investigation.
- ii. The supervisor at the scene, or the officer in control, will brief the THI as to events that have occurred prior to their arrival. Such briefing may include, but not be limited to:
 1. Extent of injuries and identifying the injured or dead.
 2. Extent of the scene, as known.

3. Location and identities of witnesses.
4. Scene preservation measures including traffic routing.
5. Identities, locations, and duties of other officers present at the scene.
- iii. The traffic homicide investigator will initiate the investigation, following accepted practices and procedures. This investigation will consist of, but by no means be limited to the following activities:
 1. Interviewing witnesses and arranging for formal statement.
 2. Examination of the roadway, vehicles, environmental factors, etc.
 3. Photography and collection of evidence as necessary.
 4. Preparation of the crash report and homicide report.
 5. Identification of the deceased and notification of the next of kin.
 6. Notification of the medical examiner's office.
 7. Notification of other appropriate agencies (FHP, DHSMV, etc.).
 - a. Within 24 hours of the crash, the THI will notify the DHSMV of the fatality.
 - i. The notification will be accomplished by following the format dictated by DHSMV.
 8. Impounding involved vehicles for further inspection.
- iv. A THI investigator may be provided to support homicide investigations.
- v. A completed copy of the Traffic Homicide Investigation report including photos will be forwarded to the State Attorney's Office for review.
 1. Accompanying the report will be:
 - a. The officer's recommendation concerning the filing of charges.
 - i. The recommendation will be documented in the narrative report.
 - b. A probable cause affidavit supporting the charges, if the THI finds criminal charges are warranted.
 - c. Traffic citations, if applicable.

8. INJURY CRASHES

- a. An officer arriving on the scene prior to Fire Rescue will advise Communications operators of the existing situation and whether or not Emergency Medical Service (EMS) is needed.
 - i. Communications operators will ensure that EMS is dispatched to the scene of crash calls received with reported or possible injuries.
 - ii. The responding officer should render or provide first aid to injured persons until the EMS arrives.
 1. Officers must keep current their skills in emergency medical care.
 2. The Department will provide, and officers will participate in basic and refresher training for emergency medical techniques.
- b. In the event that injured persons are present at the scene, officers shall check injuries persons to identify those most seriously injured, and fatalities.
 - i. Officers shall not administer medical aid that is beyond their capabilities.
 - ii. Officers should not allow incompetent volunteers to treat injured persons.
- c. Officers shall immediately summon EMS to the scene, and will assist the paramedics where needed and when possible.
 - i. At crashes where there is injury or imminent threat of injury, actions to deal with the injury/threat will take precedence over investigative or reporting activities.

- d. Only under extreme unusual circumstances will an officer transport an injured person to a medical facility.
 - i. This will only be done following supervisor approval.

9. CRASH INVESTIGATIONS INVOLVING PROPERTY DAMAGE

- a. The officer at a crash scene will ensure that property belonging to the crash victim is protected from theft or pilferage.
 - i. Should the owner/driver of a vehicle be unable to care for his/her vehicle or property, the investigating officer will remove any property of apparent value and hold the property to be placed into evidence or be held for safekeeping.
 - ii. All property removed from vehicles will be noted on the evidence or safekeeping property report form.
- b. Should the officer determine that items are not of any apparent value, the officer will note all items located inside the vehicle on the vehicle storage report form.
 - i. The officer should advise the tow driver of any property left inside the vehicles so that the tow driver can take proper precautions to safeguard the property as well as the vehicle.

10. DAMAGE TO CITY (PUBLIC) VEHICLE OR PROPERTY

- a. Basic requirements regardless of amount of damage and/or injury for any officer involved in the crash of a city owned vehicle include:
 - i. Render necessary aid.
 - ii. Notify immediate supervisor.
 - iii. Refrain from discussing the contributing factors of the crash with the driver or witnesses.
 - iv. If obstructing traffic, if possible, vehicles should be moved so as not to obstruct traffic.
 - 1. Photos should be taken prior to moving.
 - v. Give the other party information as required by law.
 - vi. Request case number.
 - vii. After investigation is complete, remove any road hazards causing and/or resulting from the crash.

11. HIT AND RUN CRASH INVESTIGATIONS

- a. Officers responding to crashes determined to be hit and run shall handle the crash as prescribed in this directive.
- b. Hit and run crashes will be handled in accordance with FSS 316.027 or FSS 316.061.
- c. Hit and run crashes causing death or serious injury will be handled as prescribed in this directive, however, the immediate assistance of other agencies in the search and/or apprehension of suspect(s) or person(s) causing the crash will be coordinated by the patrol shift supervisor. The Traffic Sergeant (or designee) will ensure that traffic investigations experts from outside of our Department will be contacted to provide assistance when appropriate.

12. CRASH INVESTIGATIONS DUE TO ALCOHOL OR DRUGS IMPAIRMENT

- a. In suspected D.U.I. crash investigations, uniform officers shall respond to these situations and perform at the scene responsibilities as prescribed in this directive and in accordance with the Department policy [4.2.3.10 - DUI Enforcement](#).

- b. The interviewing of driver(s) and witnesses, vehicle damage and roadway damage assessments, measurements, photography of scene, and evidence collection will be conducted as prescribed in Departmental policy.

13. HAZARDOUS MATERIAL, REMOVAL & DISPOSAL

- a. Fire Hazards:
 - i. Any officer arriving at a fire scene prior to the Fire Department will be responsible for initial fire suppression efforts. The initial efforts will be limited to the fire suppression which can be readily available to the officer, i.e., fire extinguisher, blankets, garden hoses, etc.
 - ii. The first officer on the scene will request the Fire Department if needed, and will direct other responding units to appropriate locations for evacuation or traffic control.
- b. Hazardous Materials:
 - i. Traffic crashes involving hazardous material spills will be investigated by the Traffic Unit officers, when available.
 - ii. Communications operators will advise the responding officer that the crash involves hazardous material, if known.
 - 1. Communications will also notify the Traffic or Patrol Sergeant.
 - a. The Traffic or Patrol Sergeant will respond to the scene.
 - iii. The responding officer(s), when possible, should approach the scene from an upwind direction. On arriving at the scene, the situation will be assessed and the following action taken:
 - 1. Isolate the hazard area and evacuate non-essential persons.
 - 2. Provide first aid until relieved by medical providers.
 - 3. Coordinate traffic control/re-routing and crowd control, requesting additional officers and public works personnel as needed.
 - a. As large an area as possible should be isolated until the hazard danger is known.
 - 4. The investigating officer should attempt to identify the hazard material by:
 - a. questioning the driver
 - b. checking the bill of lading
 - c. checking placard identification on subject vehicle
 - d. checking placard identification on subject material
 - 5. Do not enter the evacuated area to obtain the information.
 - a. If the area has to be entered, wait for properly trained and equipped personnel to respond.
 - 6. Officers at the scene will relay all known information to communications.
 - 7. Communications will disseminate all known information to other responding units, Fire Department, environmental protective agency, and any other designated special services as needed.
 - a. Once the hazard is eliminated, the investigating officer will continue the investigation of the crash.

14. CRASHES ON PRIVATE PROPERTY

- a. Private property/reportable crashes - Officers will respond to the scene, secure scene, locate drivers, passengers and witnesses, check for injuries, and obtain driver licenses and registrations.

- i. Officers will obtain if needed or available, witness statements.
 - ii. Officers will complete field sketch and crash report forms.
- b. Private property/reportable crashes shall be any crash with injury or any vehicle receiving damage.
- c. Reporting procedures shall be as prescribed by the Florida Department of Transportation standardized form.
- d. Officers will assist with driver information exchange using the state form, and issue citation if necessary.

15. COLLECTION OF INFORMATION

- a. When, due to the nature and circumstances of the crash, a traffic crash investigation is to be conducted, it may be appropriate to obtain the following types of information/evidence.
 - i. Photographs
 - ii. Preliminary field examinations of specific vehicle components (for failure or damage)
 - iii. Preliminary matching of vehicle damage (damage to and of other vehicles or objects, and to marks on the road)
 - iv. Skid tests
 - v. Observations of visibility and view obstructions
 - vi. Trip plans of each driver or pedestrian involved
 - vii. Events, maneuvers and anticipated actions just prior to crash
 - viii. Accurate descriptions and measurements of all vehicle damage, marks on roadway, final positions and vehicles, and debris
 - ix. Identification and preliminary statements from drivers and witnesses
 - x. Any other information related to the crash that may be necessary to insure the completeness of the investigation
- b. Crashes not investigated, but warrant reporting, and require less information may be handled to include:
 - i. Events
 - ii. Accurate descriptions of all vehicle damage, etc.
 - iii. Identification and preliminary statements from drivers and witnesses
 - iv. Any other information relevant to crash
- c. All information collected shall be in accordance with accuracy and admissibility. Major activities associated with the collection of information may include:
 - i. Interviewing principals and witnesses
 - ii. Examining/recording vehicle damage
 - iii. Examining/recording effects of crash on the roadway
 - iv. Taking measurements, as appropriate
 - v. Taking photographs, as appropriate
 - vi. Collecting/preserving evidence
 - vii. Exchanging information among principals
- d. Questioning drivers and witnesses may be as follows:
 - i. Question drivers and witnesses separately and individually, tape record if available and use proper note taking procedures for obtaining statements.
 - ii. Minor traffic crashes questioning should take place at the scene.
 - 1. In fatal crashes and follow-up crashes questioning should take place at a more suitable location, preferably police headquarters.

2. Questioning may be delayed if medical attention and regaining of emotional stability is warranted.
- iii. Investigating officers should be aware of crash scene evaluation and questioning procedures.
 1. Officers will be objective and exhibit diplomacy and professionalism in their attitude governing crash investigations.
- iv. Evidence of alcohol and/or drug impairment if determined should include officer observation of victim physical and emotional stability.
- v. Notification along with all necessary reports will be forwarded to the State Attorney's Office following supervisory review.

16. CRASH INVESTIGATION FOLLOW-UP

- a. The collection of off-scene (follow-up) data will be the responsibility of the investigating officer on a case by case basis. This can include, but not be limited to:
 - i. Medical reports
 - ii. Physician's reports
 - iii. Blood and other chemical tests
 - iv. Driver physical handicap(s)
 - v. Vehicle mechanical inspections
 - vi. Drag factors tests

17. ENFORCEMENT ACTION PROCEDURES AT CRASHS

- a. Investigations at crash scenes will normally result in detecting evidence necessary to support the issuance of criminal citations, infraction citations, or physical arrest. Upon determination of a violation of traffic law or ordinance, the officer will take appropriate enforcement action.
- b. In taking any positive enforcement action, the officers must establish all elements of the violation. Elements that the officer has not personally witnessed must be established through investigation. The investigation may include, but not be limited to:
 - i. Statement of admission made by violator
 - ii. Statements of witnesses
 - iii. Physical evidence
- c. Officers may elect not to issue citations at crash scenes due to:
 - i. The violator left the scene due to injury.
 - ii. Additional investigation being needed. In these instances, officers may complete the citation and forward it to the clerk of the court to be served to the violator.

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RESPONSIBILITY INDEX

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