

**FIRE DEPARTMENT**  
**STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE**  
**FIRE DEPARTMENT VEHICLE SAFETY**  
**EMERGENCY AND NON-EMERGENCY RESPONSE**  
**SAFE EMERGENCY OPERATIONS ON ROADWAYS**

6/10

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**PURPOSE:**

Fire Department responses to and from emergency incidents as well as emergency operations on roadways present a high level of risk to fire fighter safety. This procedure identifies requirements for the implementation of a safe Fire Department vehicle operations program. This procedure shall be enforced for all Fire Department vehicle operations. The company officer and the driver of the vehicle are responsible for the safety of all vehicle operations and managing compliance of this standard operating procedure.

**POLICY:**

Fire Department vehicles shall be operated in either an emergency mode utilizing vehicle emergency lights and sirens (e.g. Code 3, Priority 1) or a non-emergency mode (e.g. Code 2 or Priority 2). Regardless of the vehicle operation mode, it is the responsibility of the driver of each Fire Department vehicle to drive safely and prudently. It is the responsibility of the company officer to ensure that the driver is operating the Fire Department vehicle in a safe and prudent manner.

All employees are required to use seat belts at all times when operating a Fire Department vehicle. All personnel shall ride only in regular seats provided with seat belts. Riding on tailboards or other exposed positions is not permitted on any vehicle at any time. The company officer and driver of the vehicle shall confirm that all personnel and riders are on-board, properly attired, with seat belts on, before the vehicle is permitted to move. This confirmation shall require a positive response from each rider, as in "ready."

Vehicles shall be operated in compliance with the Federal, State and/or Provincial Motor Vehicle Code. This code provides specific legal exceptions to regular traffic regulations that apply to Fire Department vehicles only when responding to an emergency incident or when transporting a patient to a medical facility in an emergency mode. Emergency response does not absolve the driver or the company officer of any responsibility to drive with due caution. The driver of the emergency vehicle and its officer are responsible for its safe operation at all times.

When responding in the emergency mode, warning lights must be on and sirens must be sounded to warn drivers of other vehicles, as required by the Federal, State and/or Provincial Motor Vehicle Code. When responding or returning in a non emergency mode, warning lights and sirens shall not be used.

The use of sirens and warning lights does not automatically give the right-of-way to the emergency vehicle. These emergency devices simply request the right-of-way from other drivers, based on their awareness of the emergency vehicle presence. Emergency vehicle drivers and company officers must make every possible effort to make their presence and intended actions known to other drivers, and must drive defensively to be prepared for the unexpected or inappropriate actions of others.

Fire Department vehicles are not authorized to exceed posted speed limits when responding in any mode and under any conditions.

Federal, State and/or Provincial Motor Vehicle Codes prohibit travel in oncoming traffic lanes (i.e. beyond double yellow lines). However, when emergency vehicles must travel in oncoming traffic lanes, the maximum permissible speed shall be 20 mph. On limited access roadways (e.g. interstates, freeways, toll roads) the use of oncoming traffic lanes shall only be used at the request of the Police and only after it is assured that all oncoming traffic is stopped. The Fire Department shall confirm the traffic has been stopped before entering any roadway against traffic.

Intersections present the greatest potential danger to emergency vehicles. When approaching a negative right-of-way intersection (red light, stop sign, yield sign) the vehicle shall come to a complete stop and shall proceed only when the driver can account for all oncoming traffic in all lanes yielding the right-of-way. When emergency vehicles must use center or oncoming traffic lanes to approach controlled intersections, (traffic light or stop sign) they must come to a complete stop before proceeding through the intersection, including occasions when the emergency vehicle has a green light. When approaching and crossing an intersection with the right-of-way, drivers shall not exceed the posted speed limit.

Emergency response is authorized only in conjunction with emergency incidents. Unnecessary emergency response shall not be permitted. When the first unit reports on the scene and establishes and confirms that there is no emergency, the incident commander will advise Dispatch/Communications and all additional responding units shall be alerted by Dispatch/Communications and shall continue to the scene in the non-emergency mode.

During an emergency response, fire vehicles shall avoid passing other emergency vehicles. If passing is necessary, the vehicle being passed must be contacted by radio and shall, when possible, move to the right lane.

Radios, cellular phones, mobile data terminals, mobile computer terminals or other communication devices shall not be used by the vehicle operator while the emergency vehicle is in motion.

Drivers shall avoid backing whenever possible. Where backing is unavoidable, at least one spotter shall be used. If no spotter is available, the driver shall dismount and walk completely around apparatus to determine if obstructions are present before backing. Members shall not be permitted to ride on tailboard or running board while backing the vehicle.

The unique hazards of driving on or adjacent to the fireground requires the driver to use extreme caution and to be alert and prepared to react to the unexpected. Drivers must consider the dangers their moving vehicle poses to fireground personnel and spectators who may be preoccupied with the emergency, and may inadvertently step in front of, or behind, a moving vehicle.

When stopped at the scene of an incident, vehicles shall be placed to protect personnel who may be working in the street and warning lights shall be used to make approaching traffic aware of the incident. During emergency operations, vehicles shall be angled to block at least one lane of traffic and, where applicable, the road's shoulder. All personnel working in or near traffic lanes shall wear high visibility vests.

At night, vehicle mounted floodlights and any other lighting available shall be used to illuminate the scene. The total amount of lighting used at nighttime emergencies shall be managed to prevent blinding other drivers as they approach the scene.

### **Emergency Response Criteria**

- **All personnel seated and belted**
- **Warning lights and Sirens activated**
- **Maximum 10 mph over posted speed limit.**
- **Traveling in center or oncoming traffic lanes, 20 mph maximum and complete stop at all traffic lights/stop signs.**
- **Posted speed limit when entering intersections with green light.**
- **Complete stop at all red lights, stop signs and yield signs.**
- **No driver use of communication or texting equipment when vehicle in motion**