

# WEST PALM BEACH POLICE DEPARTMENT

---

## III-31 TRAFFIC CRASH INVESTIGATIONS

**EFFECTIVE: 01/01/2005**

CALEA Standards: 61.1.5, 61.2.1, 61.2.2, 61.2.3, 61.2.4, 83.2.6

CFA Standards: 23.01, 23.02, 23.04, 23.05

---

**I. POLICY:** The West Palm Beach Police Department has established guidelines for traffic crash investigation and reporting practices. To ensure that a thorough crash investigation is completed, officers will collect factual information identifying and describing the results of the crashes 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. The investigating officer will submit his or her interpretation of these facts on the appropriate crash report form in terms of the behavior of road users involved and, sometimes, the peculiar combinations of factors required to produce that particular crash.

### **II. TRAFFIC CRASH INVESTIGATION VEHICLE EQUIPMENT:**

A. Vehicles assigned primarily to traffic crash investigation will be equipped with:

1. Blue emergency (warning) lights,
2. A siren,
3. Loud speaker system,
4. A mobile radio transceiver,
5. AN AIDS kit,
6. A fire extinguisher,
7. An emergency blanket,
8. Flares (Fusee type),
9. A reflective traffic vest,
10. A basic first aid kit,
11. Biohazard protection equipment,
12. A resuscitation device,
13. A 30-foot steel measuring tape,
14. 100 and 300-foot fiberglass measuring tapes,
15. A basic tool kit,
16. Traffic cones, and
17. Spray paint.

### **III. CRASH RESPONSES:**

A. Crash reporting and investigation will be the primary responsibility of the Traffic Section. When Traffic Section officers are not available, this responsibility will be handled by the Patrol Division. In all instances, the Department will direct one or more officers to respond to the scene of any traffic crash occurring on any public road or highway within the City limits.

1. Crashes occurring on I-95 or any of its ramps will normally be investigated and reported by Florida Highway Patrol. However, an officer may be assigned to stand-by and assist or to actually handle the crash investigation as needed.

B. In a crash involving death or serious injury, the Traffic Section will be responsible for the entire investigation. Should Traffic officers not be available, the Traffic Section Sergeant will be notified and a Traffic Homicide Investigator will be called in to investigate the crash. The Shift Commander is to be notified of any crashes of this nature.

C. Hit and Run crashes will be investigated by a member of the Traffic Section. If the initial report is completed by an officer assigned to the Patrol Division, it will be turned over to the Traffic Section for follow-up.

1. Minor hit and run crashes with follow-up information may be completed by patrol officers.

D. The responding officer should evaluate the scene and determine if additional officer assistance is needed. In minor crashes, they should attempt to clear the roadway and restore traffic flow. If a vehicle is disabled and the driver or owner states no towing company preference, the officer will contact Dispatch Operations and request the company holding the current contract with the City to respond.

E. Any officer who witnesses a motor vehicle traffic crash will investigate the crash and submit the appropriate report unless exigent circumstances exist. Circumstances may include, but are limited to, during prisoner transport, en route to subpoenaed court appearance, or during off duty time. A supervisor will be advised of the circumstances and a decision will be made as to who will conduct the investigation. The witness officer will always be included as a witness in the report.

#### **IV. OFFICER RESPONSIBILITIES:**

A. When responding to a crash scene, the officer should choose the best possible approach route considering traffic flow and congestion problems based on knowledge of conditions normally existing in the area. Officers should drive safely to the scene. 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 obstructions, an inoperative traffic control device, hazards, etc.).
2. Select proper parking position which allows for maximum protection of injured persons, officers, damaged vehicles, traffic hazards, and protection of evidence.
3. The first officer arriving at a crash scene will be in charge of the scene and will take the necessary steps to provide aid to the injured, quell any disturbances between the principals, protect the scene and protect the evidence. The first officer will remain in charge of the crash scene until properly relieved by a traffic officer, supervisor or other officer assigned to handle and complete the crash investigation.
4. Check for injuries, provide first aid or medical attention, and arrange for any needed paramedic personnel and fire units.
5. Arrange for the safe rerouting of traffic around the crash.
6. Protect the scene and take precautions to prevent other crashes, check for hazards, prevent destruction of evidence, provide traffic control, and request any other personnel needed to handle the crash. Officers will protect the injured and involved vehicles from theft.
7. When the driver of a hit and run vehicle flees the scene and leaves the vehicle, the vehicle will be towed and entered into FCIC/NCIC as an abandoned vehicle. A VSR will be completed and included with the Crash Report.
8. Determine if a hit and run crash has occurred (either misdemeanor or felony) and locate the remaining driver(s). Obtain information about the hit and run driver and/or vehicle and relay to Dispatch Operations for broadcast.
9. Arrange for tow vehicle(s) to clear crash scene.
10. Restore normal traffic flow as soon as possible.

B. After the crash scene has been stabilized and all urgent information has been obtained, the officer should:

1. Determine whether proof of violation is sufficient to issue a citation or make an arrest;
2. If skids are involved, determine if skid tests are needed;
3. Supervise clean up of collision scene. If a hazard exists, have the proper agency notified to remove or repair the hazardous condition.

4. The officer at a crash scene will ensure property belonging to the crash victim is protected from theft.
5. Should the owner/driver of a vehicle be unable to care for his or her vehicle or property, the investigating officer will remove any property of apparent value and hold the property to be placed into evidence for safekeeping or released to someone authorized by the owner/driver.
6. All property removed from vehicles will be noted on the Evidence Property Report Form. Items of no apparent value left in the vehicle will be noted on the Vehicle Storage Report.
7. The officer should advise the tow driver of any property left inside the vehicle so the tow driver can take proper precautions to safeguard the property as well as the vehicle.
8. Complete Crash Report Forms.

**V. HANDLING INJURIES, FIRE HAZARDS, AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS:**

A. Officers arriving at the scene of a crash involving injuries, fire hazards, and/or hazardous materials will promptly notify medical and fire suppression personnel and other necessary assistance.

1. Officers will be responsible for providing basic life support/emergency medical care and fire suppression services until properly relieved by fire/medical personnel.
2. In the event of hazardous material crashes, officers should isolate the area, evacuate nonessential personnel, and notify Dispatch Operations to contact the Fire Department. Officers will be responsible for preliminary hazard identification (spill, leak, fire) and identification of vehicle and container placards.
3. Supervisors should ensure that only properly trained and equipped agency personnel attempt to enter areas where hazardous materials may be encountered.

B. INJURY CRASHES:

1. When crash calls are received with reported or possible injuries, Dispatch Operations personnel will notify the West Palm Beach Fire Medics. An officer arriving on the scene prior to the Fire Medics will advise Dispatch Operations of the existing situation and will determine whether or not the Fire Medics are needed.
2. Officers must keep their first responder skills in emergency medical aid current. The Department will provide, and officers will participate in, basic and refresher training in first responder medical techniques.
3. In the event injuries are present at the scene, officers will immediately summon medical assistance to the scene if not already en route. Officers will evaluate the injured persons to identify those most seriously injured. Officers will administer appropriate medical aid to injured persons. The officer will not attempt to administer medical aid that is beyond his/her capabilities. Officers will not allow incompetent volunteers to treat injured persons.
4. Officers will assist the paramedics where needed and when possible. At crashes where there is injury or imminent threat of injury, action to deal with the injury or threat will take precedence over all other police activities.
5. Only under extreme, unusual circumstances, such as natural or man-made disasters, will an officer transport an injured person to a medical facility. This will be done if no E.M.S. units are available and then only after the officer obtains supervisor approval.

C. FIRE HAZARDS:

1. Any officer arriving prior to the Fire Department at a crash scene involving a fire will be responsible for initial fire suppression efforts. The initial efforts will include, but not be limited to fire suppression which is readily available to the officer, i.e., fire extinguisher, blankets, garden hoses, etc.
2. The first officer on the scene will request the Fire Department if necessary and will direct other responding units to appropriate locations for traffic control or evacuation.

**D. HAZARDOUS MATERIAL:**

1. Traffic crashes involving hazardous material spills will be investigated by Traffic Section officers, when available. If known, Dispatch Operations personnel will advise the responding officer that the crash involves hazardous material. Dispatch Operations will also notify the Traffic Section or Patrol Division Sergeant.
2. The Traffic Sergeant or Patrol Sergeant will respond to the scene. The responding officer, when possible, should approach the scene from an upwind direction. Arriving at the scene, the situation will be assessed and the following action taken:
  - a. Isolate the hazard area and evacuate nonessential personnel;
  - b. Provide first aid until relieved by medical personnel;
  - c. Coordinate traffic control/rerouting and crowd control, requesting additional officers and public works personnel as needed. As large an area as possible should be isolated until the hazard danger is known.
  - d. The investigating officer should attempt to identify the hazardous material by questioning the driver, checking the bill of lading, checking placard identification on the subject vehicle, or placard identification on subject material.
  - e. Do not enter the evacuated area to obtain the information. If the area has to be entered, wait for properly trained and equipped personnel to respond.
  - f. Officers at the scene will relay all known information to Dispatch Operations.
  - g. Dispatch Operations will disseminate all known information to other responding units, the Fire Department, the Environmental Protection Agency, and any other designated special services as needed. Once the hazard is eliminated, the investigating officer will continue the investigation of the crash.

**VI. TRAFFIC DIRECTION AND CONTROL AT CRASH SCENES:**

- A. Traffic direction and control will be determined by the original responding officer. Upon arrival of the investigating officer, the type of control may be changed.
- B. Officers will use the patrol vehicle's emergency lights, flares, and other appropriate warning devices necessary to protect the scene and to alert approaching traffic. Scene protection and warning are especially important if victims, their vehicles or hazardous debris is in the roadway. Since flashing overhead lights, flares, etc., can create traffic problems, their unnecessary use will be curtailed. Additional officers will be requested if circumstances dictate.
  1. When traffic is heavy or when weather conditions are poor, flares should be placed no more than ten (10) feet apart.
- C. Public Works personnel will be notified for additional cones or barricades for scene protection and traffic control as needed.
- D. Should traffic control be needed for an extended period of time, the shift supervisor will arrange for officer relief.

E. Traffic Routing -

1. The routing of traffic around the scene of a crash is necessary to protect the scene from contamination. When routing traffic, the use of flares, cones, or other devices is encouraged unless flammable and/or other hazardous materials are or may be present.
  
2. The rerouting of traffic around the scene of a crash requires approaching motorists be given sufficient warning of the hazards ahead. Some factors to consider when setting up the routing include the posted speed, the required stopping distance for passenger cars, the volume of traffic, the condition of the road, and the weather.
  - a. In most cases, the 50-foot radius around the crash scene is termed the crash zone. This zone can be enlarged considerably depending on special hazards that exist at the scene.
  
3. Patrol vehicles should be positioned at the outer edges of a crash scene involving extensive roadway obstruction. Flares or other channeling devices should be placed to direct traffic flow in conjunction with other lane control techniques. The term "lane control" implies traffic is channeled past the crash zone on the uninvolved lane(s).

F. Detours-

1. When traffic has been completely stopped and it appears that the road will be closed for a long time, a suitable detour must be established. When establishing the detour, the officer will consider the following criteria:
  - a. The alternate route should be clearly marked to enable traffic to get back to the primary route as soon as possible.
  
  - b. Whenever possible, a detour should be established so that traffic flows to the right.
  
  - c. Flares will be positioned so that drivers of the detoured vehicles will have no trouble understanding which direction to turn.
  
  - d. When a detour begins in an intersection, traffic control should be done manually so vehicles being detoured may be integrated into crossing traffic safely with a minimum of delay.

**VII. COLLECTION OF INFORMATION:**

- A. When a traffic crash investigation is to be conducted, it may be appropriate to obtain the following types of information/evidence.
1. Photographs of the final positions of the vehicles, damage to vehicles, and results of the crash on the roadway, such as tire marks, debris, and damaged objects.
  
  2. Preliminary field examination of specific vehicle components for failure or damage.
  
  3. Preliminary matching of vehicle damage to the damage of other vehicles and other objects and to marks on the road.
  
  4. Observations of visibility and view obstructions.
  
  5. Trip plans of each driver or pedestrian involved.
  
  6. Events, maneuvers and anticipated actions just prior to collision.
  
  7. Accurate descriptions and measurements of all vehicle damage, marks on the roadway, final positions of vehicles, and debris.

8. Identification and preliminary statements from drivers and witnesses.
9. Any other information related to the crash that may be necessary to ensure the investigation is complete.

B. Crashes that are not investigated, but do warrant reporting, typically require less information to include:

1. Events, maneuvers and anticipated actions just prior to collision.
2. Accurate descriptions of all vehicle damage, marks on the roadway, final positions of vehicles, and debris.
3. Identification and preliminary statements from drivers and witnesses.
4. Any other information related to the crash that may be necessary to ensure that the report is complete.

C. All information must be collected so accuracy and admissibility are ensured. The information obtained is used to support planning and coordinate crash prevention programs, both within the department and in cooperation with other agencies/jurisdictions. This is accomplished through the use of State supplied crash report forms. Major activities associated with the collection of information at traffic crash scenes typically include:

1. Interviewing principals and witnesses;
2. Examining/recording vehicle damage;
3. Examining/recording effects of crash on the roadway;
4. Taking measurements;
5. Checking the roadway for factors which may have contributed to the crash;
6. Taking photographs;
7. Collecting/preserving evidence; and
8. Exchanging information among principals.

D. Questioning Drivers and Witnesses.

1. Officers will question drivers and witnesses separately and individually concerning the traffic crash. Tape recorders may be used during questioning. Officers are encouraged to use proper note taking techniques while collecting these statements. Officers will discourage drivers and witnesses from discussing the crash among themselves.

2. Questioning will normally take place at the scene.

- a. In fatal crash investigations, as well as crashes requiring follow up investigation, the process should take place at a more suitable location, preferably department facilities.

- b. Officers will question drivers and witnesses as soon as practical following the crash. The questioning may be delayed until the person has received medical attention, regained emotional stability, or attended to other urgent personal business.

- c. The investigating officer should be aware of the importance of crash scene evaluation and should begin the questioning process at a suitable point in the investigation.

3. When questioning drivers, officers will be alert to any temporary or permanent physical or emotional impairment and for evidence of alcohol and/or drug impairment which may have affected the person's driving ability.

4. Investigating officers should question drivers about where he or she was coming from, destination, emotional status (e.g., aggravation with traffic during rush hour), the point at which danger was first perceived, what the driver was doing at that point, the evasive action taken, and the condition of the vehicle prior to the crash.

5. Witnesses will be questioned as to their exact location when they witnessed the crash, what they were doing at the time, what called their attention to the crash, and what they saw, heard, or did in response.

E. Examining vehicle condition in crashes in which serious injuries or fatalities occur.

1. Tires will be checked for proper inflation, tread depth, and any indication of a blowout. Sidewalls will be checked for recent scrapes, cuts, or marks which may indicate braking or a sideways sliding action of the vehicle. Wheels will be checked for recent damage, marks, and dents.

2. The lights of the vehicle will be checked to determine if they were on or off during the crash, if they are functional, and the position of the switches.

3. The vehicle windshield and all windows will be checked for proper visibility and for evidence of any obstruction to the driver. The glass will be checked immediately for short-lived evidence, such as obscurity due to fogging or frost, old cracks, discoloration and stickers which may have created view obstructions.

4. The interior of the vehicle will be checked for loose materials that may have interfered with the driving ability of the driver.

5. Rear view mirrors will be checked for their presence and condition.

6. The frame and body will be checked for any indication of alterations in the frame, suspension, and steering mechanism.

7. The vehicle's controls will be checked and their condition noted. Note the position of the gear shift lever, position of accessory switches and light switches, position of the speedometer, proper operation of pedals, operation of horn, the presence and condition of seat belts, and the presence and condition of sun visors.

8. A significant challenge to the investigator is to determine whether deficiencies noted in the vehicle existed prior to the crash, contributed to the crash, were a result of the crash, or merely a circumstance which was present but not a contributing factor.

9. Any vehicle defects will be noted on the officer's crash report.

10. Investigators will check the damage obviously sustained in the collision of each vehicle. A thorough examination and evaluation of the damaged area may coincide with other evidence and statements as to how the crash occurred.

a. The officer should keep in mind vehicle damage conditions are very important aspects of evidence evaluation. This may be of significant importance in establishing the circumstances surrounding the crash and justifying prosecution for a violation. The officer should remember any statements made in the course of a crash investigation are confidential by statute.

F. Examining Road and Weather Conditions:

1. Officers will note all conditions of the road in the crash report. In checking these conditions, officers will approach the scene from the same direction and in the same position in the roadway as each driver, if possible.
  - a. When examining the condition of the road, officers will be alert for any foreign substance on the surface (sand, loose gravel, oil, etc.). Note the condition of the surface (dry, slippery, wet, etc.). Note the markings for clarity or obscurity. Note the grade and superelevation, width of each lane, alignment (offsets, narrowing), and the condition of the edge (rough, drop off, cracks).
2. Officers will check the road for any obstructions which existed at the time of the collision, if possible. This includes parked vehicles, glare, background lighting, foliage, and structures (permanent and temporary).
3. Officers will check the traffic control devices present, to include speed limit signs preceding the crash scene; presence, condition, size and conspicuousness of other control signs, and the proper functioning of traffic signal lights.
4. Officers will record the weather conditions existing at the time of the collision.

#### G. Taking Photographs

1. The decision to photograph most crash scenes will be at the discretion of the investigating officer. When deciding to photograph, the officer will consider the severity of the crash, the severity and nature of the injuries sustained and all other factors.
2. If the investigating officer does not have the proper equipment, then the photographs can be taken by:
  - a. Crash Investigation Units.
  - b. Crime Scene Technicians.
  - c. Road Patrol Supervisors.
3. Officers taking photographs at crash scenes will be thoroughly familiar with the rules of evidence as they apply to photographic evidence and insure the photographs taken meet approved standards.
4. Overview photographs will be taken of the crash scene with permanent fixed objects included to establish location.
5. Officers will take photographs from all angles establishing 360 degree coverage of the crash scene.
6. When large distances are involved, sequence photographs should be taken.
7. Photographs will be taken of short-lived and temporary evidence (tire marks, skid shadow mark, spillage from the vehicle, etc.).
8. Photographs will include close-up shots of physical evidence including marks on the roadway, impact damage to the vehicle, view obstructions, traffic control signs and signals (from the viewpoint of the driver), and skid marks.
9. A strict chain of custody must be maintained over photographs, negatives, and Polaroid prints.

#### H. Diagrams and Measurements

1. Sketches enable the investigator to reveal facts, relocate any given point at the scene, subsequently prepare an accurate scale drawing, and explain how a crash occurred. Officers should prepare sketches as necessary and appropriate for these and other investigative purposes.

2. Crash diagrams will be completed whenever an officer is required to complete a long form crash report (HSMV 90003).
3. Officers will begin the diagram by describing the fixed points used as a base from which measurements were taken.
4. The diagram will contain the information required by the State of Florida set forth in the Instruction Manual for crash report forms.
5. Measurements will be taken by the coordinate or triangulation systems of measurement for locating each item on the diagram. When the vehicles have been moved prior to the arrival of the officer, the diagram will contain approximate locations and will be noted as such on the diagram.
6. The diagram will be prepared to an approximate scale and will be drawn using standard mapping symbols. A traffic template will be used to prepare the diagram.
7. All field notes and sketches will be maintained by officers for compliance with the best evidence rule.

**VIII. CRASH REPORTS:**

A. On arrival at the crash scene, the officer should determine the extent of the crash and the appropriate form to use. Each crash report will be assigned a case number. The report will be completed and turned in at the end of each shift.

1. Under the requirements of Florida Statutes, a Long Form Police Crash Report (HSMV 90003), will be completed when the following criteria are met:
  - a. Injury or Death.
  - b. Hit and Run Crash involving occupied vehicles.
  - c. Hit and Run Crash with follow-up information in violation of FSS 316.027 or 316.061.
  - d. DUI in violation of 316.193.
2. Though not required by statute, a long form report will be completed when a city owned police vehicle is involved in a traffic crash.
  - a. Other City owned vehicles involved in a crash will require a long form report when the collision involves injuries.
  - b. When only city vehicles are involved in a crash on City property, such as at the City Vehicle Maintenance Complex, no report by the Police Department is required.
  - c. When a vehicle is transporting hazardous materials.
3. A Short Form Crash Report will be completed when the following criteria are met:
  - a. The damage exceeds \$500.00 and there are no injuries.
  - b. Hit and Run Crash with no follow-up information and no injuries.
  - c. A City owned vehicle, other than a police vehicle, is involved in a crash that does not involve injury.
4. Exchanging Information among Principals.
  - a. Officers will explain to drivers involved in the crash their individual responsibilities in reporting the crash as necessary and appropriate.
  - b. Officers will assist the involved drivers in exchanging pertinent information between each other.

c. When the investigating officer completes a crash report (HSMV 90003), the officer will provide each driver with the appropriate information concerning the other drivers on a HSMV 90006.

5. A driver wishing to report a minor damage crash after all vehicles have left the scene and no police report was completed may be given a short form that he or she can complete and mail to Tallahassee.

B. A crash with minor damage that does not exceed \$500.00 and no injuries may require a Driver Exchange of Information be completed by the drivers.

1. According to F.S.S. 316.066, persons involved in the above are not required to report the crash to D.H.S.M.V., but may choose to have the responding officer complete the appropriate crash report.

C. Under no circumstance will an officer investigate a crash in which he or she is involved.

D. Crash reports can be completed for collisions occurring on private property.

1. Criminal citations can be written for violations occurring on private property.

**IX. REPORTING CRASHES THAT OCCUR DURING A PURSUIT:**

A. When an officer is engaged in a pursuit and a crash occurs that does not involve the pursuing officer, the pursuing officer will investigate the crash and submit the appropriate report.

1. If the pursuit involves a stolen vehicle and the crash involved the stolen vehicle and a fixed object, the incident can be handled by inclusion in the recovery report.

2. Any crash that results from the pursuit of a traffic violator by another agency will be investigated by this Department and the appropriate report completed.

**X. REQUIREMENTS FOR OFFICER INVOLVED CITY VEHICLE CRASHES:**

A. Beyond the basic requirements at all crash scenes, any officer involved in a crash in a City owned vehicle will:

1. Notify immediate supervisor;

2. Refrain from discussing contributing factors to the crash with the other driver and other witnesses.

B. In all cases, the officer assigned to investigate any crash involving a City vehicle will complete a Long Form Crash Report.

C. If an officer is injured in any manner, the First Report of Injury Form will be completed and turned in with the Crash Report.

D. The officer's immediate supervisor will ensure all requirements of procedure are met and any other action required to complete the investigation is taken.

**XI. SUPERVISOR'S PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING CRASHES OR INCIDENTS INVOLVING DAMAGE TO DEPARTMENT VEHICLES, PROPERTY OR EQUIPMENT:**

A. All accidents or incidents involving damage to Department vehicles, property or equipment will be reported immediately, by the officer involved in the incident which caused the damage, to his or her Supervisor so that the incident may be investigated by a Section/Shift Commander.

B. The Section/Shift Commander will complete a Crash Review Report if a Department vehicle is involved in a traffic crash. If a Department vehicle is damaged by means other than a traffic crash or other Department property or equipment is damaged, the Section/Shift Commander will complete a report in memorandum form.

C. The report along with a copy of the crash report or Offense/Incident report will be forwarded to the Division Commander of the affected member.

D. The Division Commander will review the report and make any comments as necessary. He or she will then forward the report and all attachments to the Assistant Chief of the affected Division.

E. The Assistant Chief of Police of the affected Division will ensure that appropriate action is taken and that the report is filed in the member's personnel file.

F. When a crash results in the death or serious injury of an officer or another, a report of the findings, including the relevant facts surrounding the crash and a conclusion as to whether the crash violates a Department directive will be submitted to the Chief of Police.

G. Both the Personnel Complaint Report and the report made for crashes or incidents involving damage to Department vehicles, property or equipment and should be used when there is a personnel complaint in conjunction with a crash or an incident involving damage to Department vehicles, property or equipment

## **XII. FATALITY INVESTIGATIONS:**

### **A. Duties of On-scene Officers:**

1. When it is evident 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 his or her immediate supervisor.

2. All fatality crashes or possible fatality crashes, will be handled by a Traffic Homicide Investigator (T.H.I.)

3. If a T.H.I. is on-duty, he or she will be notified and will respond to the scene of the crash and take over the investigation.

4. If a T.H.I. is not on-duty, the road supervisor will notify Dispatch Operations. Dispatch Operations will contact the Traffic Sergeant and advise of the situation.

a. The Traffic Sergeant will authorize the call-out of a T.H.I. to investigate the crash. In the event the Traffic Sergeant cannot be notified, the commander of the Special Services Division will be notified to authorize a T.H.I. call-out.

5. The immediate responsibilities of the officer at the scene of a traffic fatality are to render first aid, secure the scene and locate witnesses to the crash.

a. Other vehicles will be kept out of the scene. The road will be closed to traffic and appropriate detour routes selected.

b. Under no circumstances will the vehicles, bodies or other physical evidence be moved. Officers will NOT use paint, crayons, or other marking devices to deface the scene prior to the arrival of the T.H.I.

c. The officer will attempt to identify and locate witnesses to the crash.

1) The officer will obtain their names, home address and phone number, and business address and phone number.

2) The officer will ask witnesses to remain at the scene until the arrival of the T.H.I..

3) 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**

1. Upon arrival at the scene, the T.H.I. will assume command of the scene and investigation.
2. The supervisor at the scene or the officer in control will brief the T.H.I. as to events that occurred prior to his/her arrival. Such briefing may include, but not be limited to:
  - a. Extent of injuries.
  - b. Identifying the injured or dead.
  - c. Extent of the scene, as known.
  - d. Location and identities of witnesses.
  - e. Scene preservation measures, including traffic routing.
  - f. Identities, locations, and duties of other officers present at the scene.
3. The Traffic Homicide Investigator will initiate the investigation. The T.H.I.'s investigation will consist of, but not be limited to:
  - a. Interviewing witnesses and arranging for formal statements;
  - b. Examination of the roadway, vehicles, environmental factors, etc.;
  - c. Photography and collection of evidence as necessary;
  - d. Preparation of the crash report and homicide report;
  - e. Identification of the deceased and notification of the next of kin;
  - f. Notification of the Medical Examiner's Office;
  - g. Impounding involved vehicles for further inspection; and
  - h. Notification of other appropriate agencies (F.H.P., D.H.S.M.V., etc.)
    - 1) Within 24 hours of the crash, the T.H.I. will notify the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicle of the fatality.
    - 2) T.H.I.'s notification will be accomplished by means of teletype directed to TALL1, TALL7, and WPMB1. The notification teletype will follow the format dictated by D.H.S.M.V.
3. The T.H.I. will be provided adequate time to complete the homicide investigation. The investigation will be conducted during the T.H.I.'s normal working hours whenever practical.
4. The fatality report will be completed using the current Florida Highway Patrol series of report forms. In the event additional forms used by the West Palm Beach Police Department are needed, they will be attached to the report.
5. All forms and reports will be completed in the manner prescribed in the instruction book provided with the FHP report forms.
6. At the completion of the homicide investigation, a copy of the report with a set of photo prints will be forwarded to the State Attorney's Office for review.
7. The officer's recommendation of charges to be filed will be contained in the narrative portion of the report. If the T.H.I. feels criminal charges are warranted, then a Probable Cause Affidavit supporting the charges will be prepared and forwarded with the report. Traffic citations, if applicable, will be prepared and accompany the report.

8. The Office of the State Attorney will return an opinion regarding the charges recommended by the investigating officer. Instructions regarding the release of reports, vehicles, etc. will be returned by the Office of the State Attorney. All instructions will be followed by the T.H.I.

C. Follow up Investigations and Outside Assistance

1. Requests by a T.H.I. for outside assistance or special follow-up investigations will be forwarded to the commander of the Special Services Division. Justification for the request will accompany the request.

2. All requests must be approved by the Division Commander or designee.

**XIII. OFF-SCENE RESPONSIBILITY AND DATA COLLECTION:**

A. The collection of information away from the scene will be the responsibility of the investigating officer(s). This can include, but not be limited to:

- 1. Medical reports;
- 2. Physicians' reports;
- 3. Blood and other chemical tests;
- 4. Driver physical handicap(s);
- 5. Vehicle mechanical inspections; and
- 6. Drag factors' test.

B. The collection of off-scene data will depend upon the severity of the crash and the need for such data as determined by the investigating officer. In general, collection should take place in order to substantiate criminal charges in a crash.

C. Any officer who feels there is a need for such data will be afforded the opportunity to collect it with the approval of the officer's shift commander. Officers assigned as crash investigators or T.H.I.'s may conduct such collection as part of their normal duties.

D. If, due to manpower constraints or other valid situations, a police officer is prevented from conducting the investigation, the officer will forward his or her request, along with any supporting documentation, to the Crash Investigation Unit for follow-up.

E. Upon completion of the investigation, the Crash Investigator will report the results to the original investigating officer.

**XIV. EXPERT/TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND FUNCTION:**

A. Traffic officers or other Department officers will be utilized to provide expert and technical assistance. At the discretion of the Special Services Commander, experts from outside the Department may be utilized. Those experts can include, but will not be limited to:

- 1. Reconstruction experts;
- 2. Vehicle Inspection Team;
- 3. Traffic Engineers; and
- 4. Photographers.

B. Any request for outside assistance will be accompanied by a justification for use of such resources and a list of recommended experts in the field. Included in the justification will be the expected benefits of the assistance and projected cost. All requests should be in support of criminal charges expected as a result of or supported by the use of such experts.

**XV. ENFORCEMENT ACTION PROCEDURES AT CRASHES:**

A. Investigations at crash scenes will normally result in detecting evidence to support the issuance of infraction citations, criminal 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 enforcement action, the officer must establish all elements of the violation. Elements the officer has not personally witnessed must be established through investigation. The investigation may include, but not be limited to:

1. Statement or admission made by violator;
2. Statements of witnesses; and
3. Physical evidence.

C. Officers may elect not to issue citations at crash scenes when:

1. The violator left the scene due to injury and/or
2. Additional investigation is needed.
3. In these instances, officers may complete the citation and forward it to the Clerk of the Court to be served to the violator.

**XVI. REFERENCES:**

- F.S.S. 316.027 Accidents involving death or personal injuries.
- F.S.S. 316.061 Accidents involving damage to vehicle or property.
- F.S.S. 316.193 Driving under the influence; penalties.
- DHSMV Crash Report Manual.
- FHP 700 Series Report Manual.
- SOP # III-19 Patrol Vehicle and Equipment.
- SOP # III-22 Special Purpose Vehicle.
- SOP # III-28 Impoundment of Vehicles.
- SOP # III-30 Persons Suspected of Driving Under the Influence of Alcohol or Drugs.
- SOP # IV-11 Property and Evidence Management.
- SOP # IV-22 Internal Affairs Function.

---

**Delsa R. Bush, Chief of Police**

Original issue: 10/20/89  
Revised: 01/01/2005  
I.D. #: 1337

History: SOP # changed to III-31 on 01/01/2005  
Old SOP #: 22.10, 6.640.020  
Revision Dates: 03/01/99, 12/15/1999, 01/01/2005

Job Title Task Files: Shift/Division Commander, Supervisor