

WEST PALM BEACH POLICE DEPARTMENT

IV-4 AUTO THEFT INVESTIGATION

EFFECTIVE: 01/01/2005

CALEA Standards: N/A

CFA Standards: N/A

I. POLICY: The West Palm Beach Police Department has established guidelines for the investigation of auto theft cases. Accurate, timely reporting, and prompt dissemination of information is essential to recover vehicles and to apprehend auto thieves. The significance of the auto theft investigation cannot be over emphasized. Stolen vehicles are often used to facilitate other more serious crimes

II. INITIAL AUTO THEFT REPORT/ INVESTIGATION:

A. The member taking the initial report will ascertain if the vehicle or vessel was stolen and not involved in a domestic situation, towed as junk, abandoned, exchanged for drugs or repossessed.

1. If it is determined that the vehicle was stolen and the victim chooses not to prosecute, a Refusal to Prosecute form (PD-438) will be completed and forwarded along with the completed incident report. The vehicle/vessel **will not** be entered into the system as stolen.

B. When the member is reasonably sure the vehicle is stolen, he or she will obtain a complete description of the vehicle, including:

1. Year;
2. Make;
3. Model (e.g., Thunderbird, Caprice, etc.);
4. Style (e.g., 2dr, 3dr, 4dr);
5. Color;
6. Vehicle Identification Number (VIN);
7. Tag number, year, state, and type;
8. Name and address of any lien holder (bank, finance company, etc.);
9. Insurance company; and/or
10. Any unusual features or damage;
11. Unusual circumstances will be explained in the narrative portion of the police report.

C. The member investigating the auto theft will broadcast the pertinent information over his or her primary radio channel.

D. Dispatch Operations personnel will then BOLO that information on the remaining primary channel(s) and to surrounding agencies by teletype.

E. A member taking the initial report of a stolen vehicle will record the information on the following report forms:

1. An Offense Incident Report will be completed as accurately as possible.
2. A Property Report with all known vehicle information supplied in the appropriate section. Any portable personal property in the vehicle which is not a vehicle accessory will be listed on this form.
3. A Narrative Continuation containing all necessary facts of the case.
4. A Vehicle Theft Affidavit must be completed and signed by the victim/reporting party advising that they wish to prosecute; and
5. Any other appropriate report forms as the circumstances of the incident dictate.

F. After the information for the report is gathered and it is determined that the victim will prosecute, the member will contact Dispatch Operations personnel by telephone and provide the information necessary to enter the stolen vehicle into the NCIC/FCIC computer systems.

1. When a telephone is not available, the information may be sent through the electronic messaging system.
2. The member will confirm that Dispatch Operations personnel received the information when sent through the electronic messaging system.

G. The vehicle will be entered into the NCIC / FCIC computer systems by Dispatch Operations after a registration check of the vehicle has been completed and the registration information has been verified.

1. The teletype operator will provide his or her name, ID number, and the control number for the member's stolen vehicle report.

H. When the stolen vehicle information cannot be entered into the computer due to system failure, Dispatch Operations will:

1. Advise the member of the reason for not being able to enter it.
2. Provide to the member the name and ID number of the operator who attempted the entry.
3. **NOT** provide a control number.
4. Enter the information as soon as the computer is operational.

I. When the stolen vehicle information is not available at the time of the initial investigation, the member will notify Dispatch Operations.

1. Dispatch Operations can obtain registration information if the registered owners name, dob, and registered address of the vehicle or vessel are known.

J. The member's report will be turned in by the end of his or her shift on the day the report was taken.

K. Members are encouraged to contact the Auto Theft Unit with any unusual information or circumstances surrounding any theft.

III. DISSEMINATION OF STOLEN VEHICLE INFORMATION:

A. As the stolen/recovered vehicle reports are turned in, each supervisor reviewing the reports will:

1. Review and approve the report and forward the appropriate copies to the Criminal Investigations Division, Auto Theft Unit, and Information Systems.
 - a. When corrections need to be made by a member, the supervisor reviewing the reports will forward photo copies of the report to Information Systems and the Auto Theft Unit and return the original to the member for correction.
2. Enter the vehicle information on the Daily Information Sheet to be distributed at each briefing.

B. The supervisor(s) in charge of briefing for each road patrol shift will obtain from Dispatch Operations the folders containing the stolen vehicle BOLOS from other departments. The information will be reviewed and disseminated to the officers.

IV. VEHICLES REPORTED STOLEN TO AND RECOVERED BY THIS DEPARTMENT:

A. When an officer has visual contact with an unoccupied vehicle which he or she believes to be stolen, the officer will:

1. Notify Dispatch Operations of his or her location, the vehicle description, and condition of the vehicle.
2. Verify the vehicle is stolen by requesting an NCIC/FCIC computer system check.
3. Request Dispatch Operations attempt to contact the owner.

B. When the vehicle is occupied, the officer will:

1. Notify Dispatch Operations of their location, the vehicle description, and the direction of travel, if moving.
2. Request back up.
3. Give a description of the suspect(s), if possible.
4. Request an NCIC/FCIC computer system check for stolen vehicle status.

C. After the investigating officer has control of the vehicle, any suspects, and the scene, he or she will:

1. Thoroughly search the vehicle for property and evidence left by the occupants which may indicate their identity or connect them to other crimes.
2. Conduct a thorough inventory of all property in the vehicle and record the property on a property receipt.
3. Any property that does not belong to the owner of the vehicle and is not determined to be evidence will be placed into evidence as found property.
4. Firearms located in a vehicle will be treated as evidence unless confirmed otherwise.
5. Process the vehicle if he or she locates any possible latent finger print evidence.
6. Request Crime Scene if the vehicle is suspected of involvement in any violent felonies which occurred within our jurisdiction.
7. Notify the Auto Theft Unit whenever a suspect is arrested for auto theft, possession of a vehicle with an altered VIN, or auto theft related crimes; and
8. Attempt to interview the suspect if the Auto Theft Unit members are unavailable.
9. The recovering officer will not leave the vehicle unattended until the vehicle is properly released to the towing service or owner unless there are exigent circumstances.

D. When the owner can be contacted by Dispatch Operations personnel or the investigating officer:

1. The owner may choose a method of removing his or her vehicle as long as it can be accomplished in a timely manner (30 minutes or less).
2. The officer will not permit the vehicle to be driven from the scene if the ignition or steering column has been tampered with or there is significant damage to the vehicle.

E. The officer will request a contract wrecker if the owner cannot be contacted. The wrecker will transport the vehicle to the appropriate facility where it may be released upon proof of ownership.

F. When the vehicle is towed because of involvement or suspected of involvement in a serious crime or it has some other evidentiary value, the officer will:

1. Notify Criminal Investigations Division personnel for direction reference handling, processing, and storage of the vehicle.

2. Place an "INVESTIGATIVE HOLD" on the vehicle and complete a VSR including the name, rank, and ID number of the officer who authorized the hold and the reason for the hold; "SAFEKEEPING" is not a recognized hold category.

3. No holds will be placed on a vehicle without the name of the specific officer or detective and must include a supervisor who is authorizing the hold with the exception of abandoned/recovered vehicles specifically under Section VIII.

G. The officer will contact Dispatch Operations personnel by telephone and provide the necessary information for canceling the stolen vehicle from the NCIC/FCIC computer systems.

1. When a telephone is not available, the information may be sent via the electronic messaging system.

a. The officer will confirm that Dispatch Operations personnel received the information.

2. Dispatch Operations personnel will cancel the vehicle entry and provide his or her name, ID number and the original control number to the officer for the police report.

3. When the vehicle cannot be canceled from the computer system, Dispatch Operations personnel will provide his or her name, ID number and a specific explanation of why the cancellation cannot be made. This information will be included in the officer's report.

a. When the reason for not being able to cancel the stolen vehicle is computer system failure, Dispatch Operations will cancel the information as soon as the computer system is operational.

b. When the Auto Theft Unit receives a report of a recovered stolen vehicle that could not be canceled at the time of recovery, it is their responsibility to ensure the vehicle is canceled from the computer system.

H. Officers will write a supplemental report using the original Auto Theft report case number including all appropriate report forms, such as Rough Arrest, N.T.A., a narrative, property supplement, etc.

V. VEHICLES REPORTED STOLEN TO ANOTHER AGENCY AND RECOVERED BY THE WEST PALM BEACH POLICE DEPARTMENT:

A. When an officer verifies a vehicle he or she has contact with has been reported stolen to another agency through teletype confirmation with that agency, the officer will follow the same procedure outlined in Section IV.

B. Dispatch Operations personnel will notify the originating agency of the recovery of the vehicle and confirm it is stolen. All communications regarding the stolen vehicle will be accomplished by teletype.

C. It is the responsibility of the originating agency to notify the owner. Dispatch Operations personnel will confirm the originating agency is to make owner notification in the recovery notification teletype.

D. Arrangement for removal and release of the vehicle is the responsibility of the originating agency.

1. When the agency cannot be contacted or does not respond in a timely manner (30 minutes or less), this Department's contract towing service will remove the vehicle.

E. The recovering officer will not leave the vehicle unattended until the vehicle is properly released to the originating agency, towing service, or the owner unless there are exigent circumstances.

F. When the recovered vehicle has been involved in or is suspected to have been involved in a serious crime this Department is investigating, the officer will notify the Detective Bureau and Crime Scene for processing prior to releasing it to the owner.

G. The officer will complete a report using the appropriate forms, including but not limited to, Offense Incident Report, Property Report, VSR, etc.

VI. VEHICLES REPORTED STOLEN TO THE WEST PALM BEACH POLICE DEPARTMENT AND RECOVERED BY ANOTHER AGENCY:

A. When another agency notifies this Department they have recovered a vehicle reported stolen to this Department, all communications between this Department and the recovering agency will be accomplished or verified through teletype.

B. Dispatch Operations will attempt to contact the owner of the vehicle to make arrangements to recover their vehicle.

1. When the owner cannot be contacted, Dispatch Operations will advise the recovering agency and request our contract towing service remove the vehicle for storage, when practical.

2. When recovered outside the service area of our contract towing service, the recovering agency will be authorized to tow the vehicle using their S.O.P.

C. The vehicle will be processed for latent fingerprints by the West Palm Beach Police Department's Crime Scene Unit if it was used to facilitate any other violent felonies within this jurisdiction.

1. When the vehicle is recovered out of the area, Dispatch Operations will request the recovering agency process the vehicle for latent fingerprints if it was used to facilitate any other violent felonies within this jurisdiction or there is a suspect(s) in the case.

VII. TELETYPE RECORDS:

A. Any and all teletypes regarding stolen vehicles between this Department and another agency will be attached to the original or supplementary report. This information may include:

1. FCIC/NCIC hit records.

2. Confirmation records with the location where the vehicle is stored and any other pertinent information.

3. Owner notification to include; individual contacted, date, time and method used and the name and ID of contact person.

VIII. ABANDONED/RECOVERED VEHICLES:

A. When an officer locates a vehicle which he or she believes to be stolen (punched steering column, loose V.I.N. plate, etc.) and the NCIC/FCIC computer check is negative, the officer will attempt to verify ownership.

1. If occupied, the officer will verify the identity of the operator and occupants of the vehicle; include thumbprints on a field interview card if additional processing is not required before release.

2. If ownership cannot be established, the officer will contact the Auto Theft Unit for direction.

3. If an Auto Theft Detective is unavailable, the officer will impound the vehicle and place a "HOLD" on the vehicle for the Auto Theft Unit. The officer will leave a message on the Auto Theft Unit's voice mail system informing them of the case number and location of the vehicle.

4. The officer will notify Dispatch Operations following the same procedure as outlined in Section II, (F).

5. The report will be forwarded to the Auto Theft Unit for investigation.

B. Whenever a vehicle is towed and the owner is not present, the investigating officer will instruct Dispatch Operations to enter the vehicle in the NCIC/FCIC computer systems as "Abandoned/Recovered."

IX. DISPATCH OPERATIONS:

A. It is the responsibility of Dispatch Operations personnel to enter reported stolen vehicle information into the NCIC/ FCIC computer system provided:

1. There is sufficient information to enter the vehicle into the computer system.
2. The information is verified through a registration check or by the officer having in his or her possession the vehicle registration form or the title.
3. The computer system is operating.

B. Dispatch Operations will request the following information in all cases of a stolen vehicle recovered by another agency and reported to this Department:

1. The date of recovery;
2. The location of recovery (address);
3. Type of location;
4. The condition of the vehicle;
5. The method of theft, if it can be determined;
6. The phone number of the person who handles auto theft follow-up for that agency;
7. If an arrest was made and/or all suspect information;
8. The recovering agency's case number; and
9. The name, address and telephone number of the tow company.

C. All information will be documented on a Request for Cancellation Report and/or a continuation, if necessary, and placed in the Auto Theft Unit File.

D. Dispatch Operations will cancel the vehicle from the NCIC/FCIC computer systems.

E. Dispatch Operations will make the initial attempt(s) to notify the owner with the information provided by the reporting party. If unsuccessful, Dispatch Operations will document the date, time, and phone number of the attempted contact on the Request for Cancellation Report.

X. AUTO THEFT UNIT:

A. It is the responsibility of the Auto Theft Unit to review all stolen/recovered vehicle reports.

B. When a stolen vehicle report does not contain a control number, the Auto Theft Unit will determine why a control number was not issued.

1. If the reason the stolen vehicle was not entered was a lack of information from the owner/victim, that person will be contacted. When the needed information is received, the Auto Theft Unit will ensure the vehicle is entered by Dispatch Operations into NCIC/ FCIC computer systems.
2. If the stolen vehicle was not entered due to system failure, the Auto Theft Unit will ensure the vehicle is entered by Dispatch Operations when the problem has been corrected.

- C. The Auto Theft Unit will confirm that stolen and recovered stolen vehicles are canceled from NCIC/FCIC.
- D. If Dispatch Operations was unsuccessful in contacting the owner of the recovered stolen vehicle, the Auto Theft Unit will assume responsibility for contacting the owner.
- E. Auto Theft or assigned detectives if vehicle is involved in additional crimes, will ensure thorough and accurate information is entered.
- F. Inaccurate information will be modified immediately, utilizing a supplemental report.
- G. Information will be updated as the investigation progresses.

XI. REFERENCE:

- SOP # III-1 Arrest Procedures.
- SOP # III-25 Vehicle Pursuits.
- SOP # III-28 Impoundment of Vehicles.
- SOP # IV-6 Crime Scene Investigations.
- F.S.S. 319.33 Offenses Involving Vehicle Identification Numbers.
- F.S.S. 812.014 Theft.

Delsa R. Bush, Chief of Police

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Old SOP # 6.200.022 (Stolen Vehicle Reporting and Information) and 6.220.002 (Recovered Stolen Vehicles) were combined.
Revision Dates: 12/15/98, 09/30/2002, 01/01/2005

Job Title Task Files: Shift Commander, Road Sergeant, Dispatch Operations,