

**SAN DIEGO POLICE DEPARTMENT
PROCEDURE**

DATE: July 14, 2016
NUMBER: 7.02 – TRAFFIC
SUBJECT: TRAFFIC COLLISION INVESTIGATION
RELATED POLICY: [7.02](#)
ORIGINATING DIVISION: TRAFFIC
NEW PROCEDURE:
PROCEDURAL CHANGE:
SUPERSEDES: DP 7.02 – AUGUST 16, 2013

I. PURPOSE

This Department procedure establishes guidelines for traffic collision investigations.

II. SCOPE

This procedure applies to all members of the Department.

III. PROCEDURES

A. Determining Type of Collision

1. Communications Division personnel will determine the type of collision based upon information received over the telephone in order to properly dispatch the necessary units.
2. In the case of a reported injury collision or no detail accident, the first officer on the scene shall determine the collision category and advise the radio operator as soon as possible.

B. Responsibility for Conducting the Investigation

Generally, traffic collision investigations will be conducted as follows:

1. Field patrol units are responsible for investigating minor injury collisions, misdemeanor hit-and-run collisions, and City property collisions.
2. Field traffic units shall investigate felony prosecution collisions, fatal or serious injury collisions, and DUI collisions, as well as collisions involving federal, county, or City-owned vehicles, when available.
 - a. To warrant felony prosecution, there must be injury requiring the victim's hospitalization for other than observation, or injury that incapacitates the victim for a significant period of time.
 - b. A serious injury collision (11-80) is defined as a collision that results in an injury requiring hospitalization for more than 24 hours (for other than observation). Serious injury collision (11-80) injuries are fully defined in the Traffic Collision Manual, Collision Classifications section.
 - c. If there is any question as to whether injuries qualify as a felony or serious injury collision, a Traffic Division supervisor shall be contacted immediately.
3. When no traffic units are available, patrol units will be responsible for the collision investigation, regardless of type.
4. Collisions involving state vehicles with property damage only, can be investigated by any field patrol unit. Collisions involving state vehicles with injuries will be investigated by traffic units when requested.

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C. Notifying Risk Management

The Fleet Safety supervisor will notify the Supervising Claims Representative at Risk Management the following business day under the following circumstances:

1. Fatal or serious injury collisions, if it is anticipated or expected that a claim will be filed against the City;
2. Serious injury collisions that are related to police pursuits, whether or not a police vehicle is actually involved in the collision; or,
3. Serious injury collisions involving City equipment.

D. Required Reports

1. Officers who are dispatched to, or who become aware of, an injury collision will prepare the required reports in accordance with this

procedure and the Department's Traffic Collision Manual. A complaint of pain is sufficient to qualify as an injury requiring a collision report.

2. When parties are transported to hospitals, officers shall fill out the Traffic Accident Information card (PD-513-TS), in addition to the normal required reports, and provide the card to the injured party to assist in obtaining collision reports later.

E. Exchanging Information Between Parties

Under no circumstances should officers discourage parties involved in traffic collisions from exchanging names, addresses, telephone numbers, and other related information for insurance purposes.

IV. NON-INJURY, NON-CITY EQUIPMENT COLLISIONS

- A. Property damage collisions that do not involve City vehicles or City property will not be investigated, with the exception of hit-and-runs, other government agencies' vehicles (when requested), DUI, damage resulting from police pursuits, and collisions involving other felony crimes. Officers may use their discretion in case of extreme property damage when deciding whether to take a report. Communications Division will advise calling parties of the Department's policy and will dispatch an officer when immovable vehicles create a hazard or other public safety hazards reportedly exist.
- B. Officers handling "property damage only" collision scenes will assist in clearing the scene, verify the exchange of information, and issue each party a Traffic Accident Information (TAI) card (PD-513-TS). The appropriate box on the back of the TAI card shall be marked indicating whether a report has been taken.
- C. Officers will assist citizens in obtaining tow trucks and transportation at the scene. They will explain the Department's collision investigation policy and the requirements of filing an SR-1 form with the Department of Motor Vehicles.
- D. When the owner of damaged property or a vehicle cannot be located, a Traffic Accident Information card (PD-513-TS) will be completed and attached to the vehicle or property. The appropriate box on the card will be checked indicating whether a report has been taken. This will avoid the reporting of unfounded hit-and-run incidents by citizens.

V. REPORTS FOR DELAYED AND REMOVED FROM SCENE COLLISIONS

- A. A report must be made in all cases where an injury is claimed or a hit-and-run occurred.

- B. When a report is made, it must contain all available information pertaining to the collision. The block "Investigation Made – Not at Scene" is to be checked.
- C. Property damage only reports will not be taken at the area stations' front counters. Personnel assigned to those locations will explain the Department's policy and provide SR-1 forms to those citizens requiring them. The following guidelines apply to collision reports requested by citizens at the area commands:
 - 1. Minor Injury (11-81) - the collision report (CHP-555) is mandatory and shall be completed by the front counter officer regardless of where the collision occurred in the City. The collision report form is required for DMV use. The abbreviated Front Counter Collision report Form (**CHP-555-03**) **SHALL NOT** be used for reporting injury collisions.
 - 2. Misdemeanor Hit and Run - the collision report (CHP-555) and the Hit-and-Run Field Report form (PD-161) are required. Officers shall take a hit-and-run report when it is brought to their attention.
- D. Personnel will not refer citizens to Traffic Division for purposes of filing a report, unless a traffic felony occurred.

VI. COLLISION REPORT AMENDMENTS

- A. Minor amendments are those that do not significantly change the investigator's conclusions or findings. Officers will adhere to the following procedure when making minor amendments to collision reports:
 - 1. The originating officer must prepare an ARJIS-9 report listing changes. The heading on the ARJIS-9 shall state in bold letters, "**Amendment to Accident Number _____**" (list number).
 - 2. The ARJIS-9 must be approved by a supervisor.
 - 3. The ARJIS-9 will be sent to Records Division's Customer Service Section at MS 726, where the staff will write the word "Amended" in red ink in the upper margin of each page on which amendments have been made.
- B. Amendments that alter the conclusions of the collision report, or significantly affect the parties involved, shall have the approval of the Commanding Officer of Traffic Division.
 - 1. The officer (or supervisor) requesting the amendment shall submit a revised report with the words "Amended Report" written boldly across the top and bottom of the report in red ink.

2. A separate, confidential report documenting the reasons for the amendments will also be submitted and filed with the collision report. The information therein shall not be released without the approval of the Chief of Police or the City Attorney. The confidential report shall have the heading "FOR THE EXCLUSIVE USE OF THE CHIEF OF POLICE AND/OR CITY ATTORNEY" at the top and bottom.
3. Amended reports shall be promptly forwarded to the Traffic Investigations Unit Supervisor at Traffic Division, MS 732. Upon approval of the Traffic Division Commanding Officer, amended reports will be forwarded to Records Division at MS 726.
4. Upon approval, the amended report will be attached to the original collision report and the pages numbered accordingly by Records Division personnel.

VII. ARRESTS AND CITATIONS

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- A. A physical arrest will be made in the case of a felony or a misdemeanor DUI whenever possible. (Notify Warrants, DUI citation procedures or Warrants of Arrest will be made when injuries preclude the immediate arrest of the suspect.)
- B. Adult Arrests - the arrest report (ARJIS-8) is required in addition to the proper collision report(s).
- C. Juvenile Arrests - the juvenile contact report (ARJIS-8) and juvenile affidavit (PD-1062) are required in addition to the proper collision report(s).

Officers should refer to the Traffic Collision Report Guide in the Traffic Collision Manual to determine which reports are required under specific circumstances.

VIII. FATAL, FELONY, AND SERIOUS INJURY COLLISIONS

- A. The Traffic Investigations Unit (TIU) shall be notified immediately of all fatal, felony, and serious injury collisions that occur during normal working hours (0630 to 1630), Monday through Friday.

During non-office hours, the TIU Sergeant shall be notified immediately of the following:

1. Fatal collisions;
2. Felony hit and run cases (particularly when the suspect is in custody);

3. Felony drunk driving cases; and,
 4. Any time the expertise of the Traffic Investigations Unit is needed.
- B. The TIU Sergeant will determine if investigative personnel are necessary at the scene. If the Traffic Investigations Unit responds, all witnesses and uninjured parties should be kept at the scene. Process the suspect as normal; however, prior to booking, check with the TIU investigator(s) at the scene. If TIU personnel have responded, DO NOT admonish or question the suspect(s). Document all unsolicited statements and forward them to the lead investigator at the scene.
- C. The TIU Sergeant shall be promptly notified of all serious traffic injuries or fatalities involving other government agencies, foreign dignitaries, or any traffic mishap occurring in our jurisdiction that has international implications. The TIU Sergeant will evaluate and determine the investigative response required.

IX. POLICE EQUIPMENT AND CITY EQUIPMENT COLLISIONS

- A. Police Equipment Collisions
1. Officers shall notify Communications Division of all police equipment collisions as their first course of action, after rendering any emergency aid. Injury collisions shall be brought to the immediate attention of the appropriate commanding officer.
 2. When police personnel are involved in on-duty collisions, they should not move vehicles from the collision scene unless it is necessary and then only after the vehicle's position has been marked. Collision-related statements should be made only to the investigating officers and supervisors. A Traffic Division supervisor will respond to incidents involving intentional driving acts causing damage to a police or civilian vehicle to determine the appropriate reporting method (CHP-555 Collision Report or ARJIS-9 with RM-1555 and RM-1551).
 3. A Vehicle Damage Report (RM-1551) is required within 24 hours of City employees being involved in traffic collisions. The Supervisor's Accident Report (RM-1555) shall be completed within 48 hours of the collision. All reports (originals) shall be forwarded to the Fleet Safety Supervisor at Traffic Division, MS 732. Traffic Division will render decisions as to the classification, category, and preventability of police equipment collisions.
 4. All police equipment accidents that occur on a freeway will be investigated by the California Highway Patrol (CHP). The San Diego Police Department will conduct a concurrent investigation for

administrative purposes. All other City equipment accidents on a freeway will be handled by the CHP, unless assistance is requested.

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5. The AIB Lieutenant, TIU Sergeant and Fleet Safety Sergeant shall be notified immediately when the following officer-involved collisions occur:
 - (a) Fatality;
 - (b) Serious injury to officer or citizen;
 - (c) Felony prosecution is probable; and,
 - (d) Pursuit results in serious injury, whether the officer is involved in the collision or not.

Officers on duty shall also immediately notify the TIU Sergeant and Fleet Safety Sergeant when the above circumstances involve off-duty personnel.

6. Internal Affairs will be responsible for conducting the administrative investigation of police pursuits that result in serious bodily injury or death, to any person, when it appears the accident was caused by criminal negligence or a criminal violation on the officer's part (e.g., violations of CVC 21052, 21055, or 21056.) Internal Affairs will also be called out when traffic-related incidents occur where criminal conduct is suspected regarding sworn personnel, whether on or off-duty (e.g., violations of CVC 23152, 20003, or 192(c) PC.)

Internal Affairs is to be called in these incidents, via standard callout procedures, through the Watch Commander's Office.

B. City Vehicle Collisions

NEW

1. City vehicle collisions should be investigated by Traffic Division personnel (Motors or AIB). If they are unavailable, a patrol unit may conduct the investigation. A Traffic Division officer is not required to handle City property collision investigations.
2. City of San Diego paramedic units are part of the San Diego Fire-Rescue Department and are classified as City equipment vehicles. Collisions involving paramedic vehicles are classified as City equipment collisions and they will be investigated per this procedure.
3. Collisions involving Metropolitan Transit Board System buses or the light rail trolley are not classified as City equipment accidents. They will be investigated as any other traffic collision, as outlined in this procedure. This Department will not investigate property damage only collisions.

C. Photos Required

Photographs are required for all Police equipment and City equipment collisions.

Officers investigating Police and City equipment collisions will take digital photographs at the scene. Photo discs will be processed as follows: The investigating officer will mark the photo as "Original." Prior to impounding the disc, the officer will make a copy of the original disc, and mark the second disc "Report Copy." The original disc will then be impounded. The "Report Copy" disc will be attached to the collision report, and sent to Records Division.

X. SCHOOL BUS COLLISIONS

- A. Pursuant to Vehicle Code section 12517.1(b), the CHP shall investigate all school bus accidents, except that accidents involving only property damage and occurring entirely on private property shall be investigated only if they involve a violation of the Vehicle Code.
- B. The California Administrative Code (13 CCR Sections 1219 and 1237) requires school bus accidents to be reported to the CHP. The CHP is charged with investigating all traffic collisions involving school buses, including those on City streets, when the bus is transporting students. As a matter of routine, the Department will dispatch units to the scene to assist as needed until the CHP assumes control of the incident.
- C. When there are no students aboard the bus, the CHP will not conduct a collision investigation, unless the collision occurs in their jurisdiction.
- D. This Department will investigate all other types of school bus collisions occurring on City streets or property, with the exception of property damage only accidents.

XI. HIT-AND-RUN COLLISIONS

- A. Communications Division shall dispatch a field unit to investigate hit-and-run collisions. If the victim has moved his/her vehicle prior to the arrival of an officer, a field report will be made only under the following conditions:
 - 1. The victim moved the vehicle while in pursuit of the suspect.
 - 2. The victim drove to a telephone located within a reasonable distance from the collision site, or after ceasing the pursuit of the suspect.
 - 3. The victim is an out-of-town visitor and it would be difficult for him/her to locate an area station.

4. The victim is unable to drive the vehicle to an area station.
- B. In all other cases where the victim has moved his/her vehicle and the preceding exceptions do not apply, Communications Division personnel shall direct hit-and-run victims to the nearest area station. Area stations, including the Headquarters front counter, are open from 0800 to 1700 hours, Monday through Friday, except holidays.
- C. Victims must bring the damaged vehicle with them. Hit-and-run reports cannot be taken over the phone. Front counter personnel will inspect and measure height and length of the damage, photograph the vehicle with a digital camera, and obtain paint samples, if practical. The investigating officer will mark the photo disc as "Original". Prior to impounding the original disc, the officer will make a copy and mark the second disc as "Report Copy". The "Report Copy" disc will be attached to the collision report and paint samples will be attached to the hit-and-run report. These reports will be joined and forwarded to Records Division at MS 726.
- D. Uniformed officers dispatched to the victim's location (or contacted in the field by a victim) will prepare the necessary reports and shall not refer them to Traffic Division or area stations.

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XII. OTHER COLLISIONS

- A. Collisions involving animals that result in significant damage to a vehicle or injury to a person will be reported on the traffic collision reports. If a collision involves a dog or cat, and there is no significant damage to the vehicle, the officer should attempt to contact the animal's owner. If the animal is injured and still alive, and the owner cannot be located, the officer should follow SDPD Procedure 6.09, Handling of Injured Animals, to provide for care. A traffic collision report is not required. If a large animal, such as a horse or cow, is involved, or if there is damage to the vehicle, a traffic collision report is required. If a police vehicle is involved in a collision with a dog or cat, and there is no damage to the police vehicle, then an ARJIS-9 is required. If the police vehicle is damaged, then a traffic collision report is required.
- B. Bicycle accidents with an injury, which occurred on a roadway, sidewalk, or paved shoulder of the roadway will be investigated and reported as a traffic collision.
- C. Photographs are required for collisions involving federal, state, county, and other local government vehicles. Officers investigating collisions involving such vehicles will take digital photos at the scene. The investigating officer will mark the photo disc as "Original." Prior to impounding the original disc, the officer will

make a copy and mark the second disc “Report Copy.” The “Report Copy” disc will be attached to the collision report and sent to Records Division.

XIII. STATE HIGHWAY-RELATED COLLISIONS

- A. All collisions that occur on, or within 250 feet of, a state highway intersection or freeway ramp are state highway-related traffic collisions.
- B. To identify these collisions, the “State Hwy Rel” box on the Traffic Collision Report (CHP-555) must be marked.