

UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP POLICE DEPARTMENT
POLICY AND PROCEDURE

No. 210

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TRAFFIC CRASH INVESTIGATIONS

- I. **PURPOSE:** To establish guidelines for the Upper Merion Township Police Department's traffic crash investigation and reporting process.
- II. **POLICY:** It shall be the policy of the Upper Merion Township Police Department to comply with the applicable sections of the Pennsylvania Vehicle Code (Title 75, Chapter 37, Subchapter C) regarding the reporting requirements for "Accidents and Accident Reports". The primary objective of investigating traffic crashes is to obtain information that can be used to develop and maintain crash prevention and reduction programs. Crash data collected accurately and completely can open the door to identification of traffic enforcement needs, roadway engineering solutions and public education campaigns.
- III. **CROSS-REF:** Policy # 230, TRAFFIC CRASH INVESTIGATIONS INVOLVING TOWNSHIP VEHICLES
- Policy # 200, TRAFFIC ENFORCEMENT
- Policy # 330, HAZARDOUS MATERIALS INCIDENTS
- Policy # 600, EVIDENCE AND PROPERTY CONTROL
- Policy # 220, TOWING OPERATIONS

IV. PROCEDURE:

A. RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. The Upper Merion Township Police Department will respond to all reported traffic crashes and then determine whether an investigation is to be conducted. Traffic crashes involving any of the following situations will be investigated:
 - a. Death or injury
 - b. Hazardous materials
 - c. Impairment due to alcohol and/or drugs
 - d. Vehicle damage to the extent that towing is required
 - e. Hit and Run
 - f. Property damage crashes in which the property owner can not be located
2. Every accident reported to the Upper Merion Township Police Department that is required to be investigated by a police officer under Title 75, Section 3746, shall be investigated and each driver provided a signed statement on an approved form that the accident was reported.
3. Traffic Safety Unit officers (TSU) will answer all traffic crash calls. If TSU officers are involved in a special assignment (i.e., selective enforcement, traffic surveys, or other activities where an Event has been entered), and a crash occurs which involves minor injuries or is non-reportable, then the patrol division will be required to investigate the crash.
4. TSU officers will investigate and analyze all crashes involving fatalities, life threatening injuries, potentially hazardous consequences, or crashes involving township vehicles where injuries or severe liability to the township is present (refer to Policy 230, TRAFFIC CRASH INVESTIGATIONS INVOLVING TOWNSHIP VEHICLES). Upper Merion Township School District Vehicles are not considered township vehicles.
5. Non-reportable traffic crashes shall be investigated, and a non-reportable traffic crash form completed unless all operators involved in the crash decline a police investigation. When all operators involved in the crash decline a police investigation, they shall be instructed to exchange driver's license, registration and insurance information. In all cases where a traffic crash is responded to and no traffic crash report is being made, the assigned officer shall complete a Call for Service Report containing the driver's license numbers and the registrations of all involved vehicles, if known.

- a. Non-reportable traffic crashes involving substantial property damage and financial loss shall be fully investigated to include, at the shift supervisor's direction, the preservation and collection of evidence, the identification and interviewing of witnesses, the taking of photographs and/or video, and the completion of the PA State Form AA-500. Officers are expected to take enforcement action whenever the crash investigation leads them to believe that a violation of a traffic law or criminal statute has occurred.
6. Crashes that had taken place over one hour prior to the reporting, unless there are extenuating circumstances, such as driver's license, registration and insurance violations, will be handled at the station. The operators will be asked to come to the police station at their convenience. The operators will be given Form AA-600 to fill out at the station. An incident number will be assigned to that report. If the crash is non-reportable, the original Form AA-600 will be turned over to our Records Department for storage. If the crash is reportable, a copy of the Form AA-600 will be made for police department files and the original given to the operators to mail to Harrisburg.
 7. Crashes involving a hit and run vehicle, whether reportable or non-reportable, will also use the one hour occurrence guideline. If the complainant furnishes a registration of the hit and run vehicle, an officer will be assigned to take the report, and the appropriate crash reporting form completed. Every effort will be made to identify the hit and run vehicle and operator. When identified, the proper charges will be filed. Hit and run crashes that are reported immediately upon discovery, and the vehicle has not moved (e.g., parked at 0900 and discovered at 1700), will be handled as within one hour of occurrence.

B. RESPONSE:

1. In cases of death or life-threatening injuries, at least two patrol units and a supervisor will respond. Once the responding police units are safely positioned, officers should provide first aid, to the extent of their training, until EMS arrives. Once EMS has taken charge of the victims, officers should survey and preserve the scene. In the event that there is not a Traffic Safety Unit officer on-duty, the supervisor will direct the Communications Center to notify an on-duty or on-call Command Officer. The Command Officer notified will decide whether or not to call-out a Traffic Safety Unit officer(s) to handle the investigation. If the call-out of Traffic Safety Unit officer(s) is approved, the Communications Center will contact the Traffic Safety Unit supervisor. The Traffic Safety Unit supervisor will coordinate the call-out of Traffic Safety Unit officer(s) to handle the investigation and ensure that the Montgomery County Detective Bureau is notified when appropriate.
 - a. Fatal crash: A traffic crash where any pedestrian, driver, or occupant of any vehicle is pronounced deceased at any hospital to which they have been transported for treatment following any vehicular crash, or where any pedestrian, driver or occupant of any vehicle is believed to be deceased at the scene of a vehicular crash and the Montgomery County Coroner is requested to respond in lieu of transporting the individual(s) to a medical facility.

- b. Life-Threatening Injury Crash: A traffic crash in which the on scene assessment by officers or EMS is such that a pedestrian, driver or occupant of any vehicle involved is significantly injured so as to present a danger, or potential danger to their life.
 - c. Other traffic crashes requiring call-out of TSU officers: A traffic crash which, by its nature or circumstances surrounding it, leads the shift supervisor to believe that the crash is best investigated by a TSU officer. These crashes may include, but are not limited to, personal injury crashes involving Upper Merion Township vehicles, other police agency vehicles, or other government vehicle(s), and other high profile crashes involving civil liability, release of hazardous materials, or serious property damage.
2. In the event of traffic crashes involving injuries that are not life-threatening, at least two patrol units will respond. Once the responding patrol units are safely positioned, officers should provide first aid, to the extent of their training, until EMS arrives. Once EMS has taken charge of the victims, officers should survey the scene and record and collect any evidence before summoning tow truck(s). Final priority should be given in all fatal and injury crashes to restoring the normal flow of traffic.
3. *Hazardous materials*: When a vehicle is leaking or carrying hazardous materials and is involved in a traffic crash, an officer should take extra precautions to prevent him/herself and others from exposure. Responding officers should consult the Emergency Response Guidebook for procedures for identifying and dealing with hazardous cargo. Traffic crashes involving the discharge of hazardous materials shall be handled in accordance with Policy #330, HAZARDOUS MATERIALS INCIDENT.
4. *Impairment of an operator due to alcohol or drugs*: If an operator involved in a traffic crash is found to be impaired due to alcohol and/or drugs, he/she will be asked to submit to standard field sobriety tests, if possible, and then handled in accordance with Section V-C (DUI Violations) of Policy #200, TRAFFIC ENFORCEMENT.
- a. In situations where a motorist who is suspected of being impaired is transported to a hospital for the treatment of injuries, the shift supervisor may assign an officer, manpower permitting, to go to that hospital and attempt to obtain a blood sample from that motorist for chemical testing.
 - b. In situations where a motorist who is suspected of being impaired is transported to a hospital for the treatment of injuries, and an officer is not sent to the hospital to obtain a blood sample, a search warrant shall be prepared and, if approved, served on the Medical Records section of the hospital. If the hospital is in Philadelphia, the search warrant must be faxed to the Philadelphia District Attorney's office for approval. Upon receipt of approval from the Philadelphia District Attorney's office, the search warrant must be taken to the Philadelphia Bail Commissioner for additional approval prior to serving the warrant at the hospital.

5. *Hit and Run*: In cases of hit and run crashes on either public or private property, the reporting officer will conduct a follow-up investigation. The reporting officer shall collect and preserve any physical evidence from the scene and any involved vehicle(s) for possible comparison with any suspect vehicle.
6. *Major traffic congestion as a result of a crash*: When roadways are congested due to a traffic crash, the shift supervisor, or his/her designee, may contact the news media and traffic reporting services if a delay is expected to occur so that motorists may be advised to take alternate routes.

C. ON-SCENE DUTIES:

1. In the event that a TSU officer is not dispatched, the officer assigned to the patrol district where the traffic crash occurred is in charge of and responsible for investigating the crash, unless otherwise directed. If the district officer is not dispatched to the scene, the Communications Center shall be responsible for designating the investigating officer. The shift supervisor may reassign the investigation to another officer at his/her discretion.
2. The first officer on the scene should check for hazardous situations and then identify injured persons and provide first aid to the extent of his/her training. He/she will summon additional medical/fire equipment if it is needed, but will not provide emergency transportation to any person unless authorized by a supervisor.
3. Responsibilities of officers at the crash scene include:
 - a. Protecting the crash scene from compounding or involving others. Officers who perform traffic direction at crash scenes will allow for the safe entry and exit of emergency vehicles and provide for a system of alternate routes for other vehicles as necessary and where possible. In cases that only involve vehicle or property damage, and the vehicles involved are driveable, the drivers should be directed by the investigating officer to move their vehicles to a safe location off the roadway as soon as possible. The following equipment will be used by officers when available to aid in protecting themselves and the scene:
 - (1) flares
 - (2) traffic cones and/or barricades
 - (3) marked police vehicles with emergency lights activated
 - (4) reflective traffic safety vests
 - b. Administering first aid pending the arrival of EMS personnel.
 - c. Summoning additional help as necessary.
 - d. Preserving evidence and marking locations. Any physical evidence collected at the scene of a traffic crash that is determined or believed to be a direct, immediate, or resulting cause of the crash shall be collected and preserved in the proper manner in accordance with Policy #600, EVIDENCE AND PROPERTY CONTROL.

- e. Locating witnesses and recording information. Information to be collected at the scene of the crash by the investigating officer should include the following:
 - (1) *Interviews of the principals and witnesses.* Officers should question drivers and witnesses separately and individually. In the case of a minor crash, this questioning is usually done at the scene. When crashes of a more serious nature are investigated, the officer should obtain a brief account at the scene and follow up at a more stable location, preferably the police station.
 - (2) *Examining and recording vehicle damage:* Officers should check vehicle equipment, controls and systems for defects that may have contributed to the crash. If there is serious injury or death, officers may place an investigative hold on vehicles for closer examination and evaluation of the damaged area. A search warrant or valid consent from an authorized individual must be obtained prior to actually inspecting, searching or removing items from the impounded vehicle.
 - (3) *Examining and recording effects of the crash on the roadway:* Officers should note all conditions of the road during the investigation of the scene. Officers should check such factors as foreign substances on the road surface; the condition of the surface; obstructions existing at the time of the crash; and weather conditions.
 - (4) *Taking photographs and/or video:* Officers should take photographs and/or video when necessary.
- f. Arranging for the clearing of the roadway to resume normal traffic patterns. The towing of vehicles involved in traffic crashes shall be accomplished in accordance with the provisions of Policy #220, TOWING OPERATIONS.

D. FOLLOW-UP INVESTIGATIONS:

1. Follow-up investigations should be conducted by the investigating officer in a timely and thorough fashion. Follow-up investigations are not necessary in all accident situations but when needed may include:
 - a. collecting additional data relating to the driver, vehicle(s) or roadway (e.g. measurements, photographs)
 - b. collecting off-scene data
 - c. obtaining formal statements or more complete information from drivers and/or witnesses.
 - d. reconstruction of the accident
 - e. preparing follow-up reports
 - f. submitting evidence for lab analysis

2. Patrol officers may request the assistance of a Traffic Safety Unit officer for follow-up investigations of traffic crashes.
3. The officer conducting the follow-up investigation shall complete the appropriate traffic crash form detailing the additional information obtained.

E. REPORTS:

1. Reportable crash investigations will be reported on the PA State Form AA-500. Classification of traffic crashes shall follow guidelines outlined in the PA Vehicle Code, Section 3746, which specifies when a crash is reportable. All other crashes are considered non-reportable. The AA-500 will also be used for all crashes involving a vehicle owned by Upper Merion Township. The address to be placed on the report for on-duty employees when operating a township vehicle involved in a traffic crash will be 175 W. Valley Forge Rd., King of Prussia, PA, 19406.
2. Non-reportable crashes shall be completed on the MDC traffic crash report form unless the system is down. In that case, the Upper Merion Township Police Department Non-Reportable Accident Form will be used.
3. When writing a traffic crash report, the vehicle at fault will be noted as unit #1.
4. All traffic crash reports will require a narrative accurately explaining the circumstances. A diagram for all reportable crashes and crashes involving township vehicles will be completed.
5. When using the AA-500 and additional room is needed for the narrative, the Continuation Sheet (AA-500C) will be used. Complete all information on top of this sheet before continuing with the narrative.
6. Whenever more than two vehicles are involved in a crash, and an AA-500 form is completed, it will be necessary to use additional pages of the form to document the required information on all involved units.
7. When a crash occurs on private property, refrain from using such locations as the "Plaza" or "Valley Forge Shopping Center". Use specific information to pinpoint the location of the crash.
8. Phone numbers are required. These become especially useful if a follow-up investigation becomes necessary.
9. Insurance information is imperative. Motorists failing to produce proof of financial responsibility after five days will be issued citations. "Unknown" will be checked in block 12 (of the AA-500), and "Unknown" will be written in the Insurance Information block on the appropriate traffic crash report.

10. Traffic crash reports are to be completed and submitted in a timely manner. If the report cannot be completed after three calendar days, the original report will be turned in with the "Case Closed" block checked "NO", unless a supervisor grants an extension. The Police Accident Supplemental Sheet (AA-500S) will then be used to complete the report for reportable traffic crashes. For non-reportable crashes, additional pages of the original report form will be used.
 - a. The Department shall forward an initial written report to PennDOT within 15 days for all traffic crashes required by law to be investigated by the police. If the initial report is not complete, a supplemental report shall be submitted at a later date.
 - b. If a traffic crash results in a fatality, the reporting officer is required to notify PENN DOT within 24 hours. This notification shall be made by completing the "Fast FARS Fatal Crash Notification Form" on-line and sending the form to PENNDOT via e-mail (www.dot6.state.pa.us/crash.nsf). To be included in FARS, a crash must involve a motor vehicle traveling on a traffic way customarily open to the public and result in the death of a person (either an occupant of a vehicle or a non-motorist) within 30 days.
11. The department shall, upon request, furnish at a cost not to exceed \$15 a certified copy of the full report of the police investigation of any vehicle crash as required by Title 75, Section 3751(b). The department may refuse to furnish the complete copy of the investigation of the vehicle crash whenever there are criminal charges pending against any persons involved in the crash unless the Pennsylvania Rules of Criminal Procedure require the production of the documents.

F. ENFORCEMENT:

1. Officers are expected to take enforcement action whenever the crash investigation leads them to believe that a violation of a traffic law or criminal statute has occurred. Elements of the violation not personally witnessed by the officer must be established through the investigation. When evidence exists to satisfy all elements of a particular violation, enforcement action should be taken. Enforcement actions will be consistent with the provisions of Policy #200, TRAFFIC LAW ENFORCEMENT.
2. When presented with a traffic crash investigation involving a fatality, a fatality while DUI, or the likelihood of a fatality resulting from the crash, the investigating officer shall contact the Montgomery County District Attorney's Office for consultation prior to filing any criminal charges.

APPROVED: _____
Chief Thomas M. Nolan

DATE: _____

APPROVED: _____
Captain James M. Early

DATE: _____

TO BE REVIEWED: ANNUALLY

DISTRIBUTION: All police officers
All police dispatchers
Township Manager
File