

Laurel Police Department – General Order
Chapter IV, Section 300, Order 303 – Accident Investigation
August 19, 2012

4 /303.05 POLICY

It is the policy of this Department to respond to all motor vehicle accidents occurring within the City of Laurel and take the appropriate course of action.

4 /303.10 PURPOSE

To facilitate the safe movement of people and vehicles by accomplishing a variety of traffic accident investigation functions which includes providing emergency service to the injured, protection of the accident scene, conducting investigations and follow-ups, preparing reports and taking proper enforcement action.

4 / 303.15 DEFINITIONS

Motor Vehicle Accident	Any event that results in unintended injury and/or property damage directly or indirectly attributable to the motion of a motor vehicle or its load.
Traffic Accident Investigation	May include collection of information identifying and describing people, roads, and vehicles involved, describing the results of the accident in terms of damage to vehicle and roadside objects, injuries to people, marks and residue on the road, and final positions of vehicles and bodies; interpretation of these facts in terms of behavior of road users involved; and, sometimes, an attempt to specify the peculiar combination of factors required to produce that particular accident.
Traffic Accident Reporting	Basic data collection to identify and classify a traffic accident and the persons, vehicles, time/location, and planned movements involved and possible factors such as traffic law violations.

4 / 303.20 PROCEDURES

A. RESPONDING TO ACCIDENTS

1. An officer will respond to all motor vehicle accidents reported to this agency which occur in the City of Laurel, including traffic accidents occurring on private property that is open for the general use of the public.
2. Officers will continue to be aware of the fact that driver impairment due to alcohol and/or drugs is a factor in many collisions and will be alert to cues or evidence of such impairment when carrying out accident reporting or investigation duties and will take appropriate enforcement action when sufficient evidence is obtained.
3. Accidents involving hazardous material will be investigated, maintaining the primary objectives of officer safety, the safety of persons/property which may be affected by the hazardous material(s), and the containment of the area and the hazardous materials).
 - a. Investigation/reporting will only proceed once the proper agencies have secured the hazardous material(s) and declared the scene safe for police personnel to enter.

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4. Officer safety is important in all situations, particularly when toxic chemicals and/or life threatening hazards may exist. Officers will consider their own safety before attempting to rescue victims and will only enter a hazardous environment under very unusual circumstances.
5. Hit and Run accidents that are reported after the fact and for insurance purposes only will be issued an event number.
6. At least one officer will respond to the scene of any reported:
 - a. Hit and Run accident;
 - b. Accident involving a City of Laurel vehicle or property; and/or
 - c. Property Damage accident
7. At least two officers will respond to the scene of any reported
 - a. Personal injury or fatal accident
 - b. Accident involving a disturbance between the principals
 - c. Accident involving an alcohol/drug impaired driver
 - d. Accident involving major traffic congestion because of the accident
8. When directed to respond to a traffic accident, the officer(s) will be informed of the exact location, the reported severity of the accident, the response type, whether traffic is blocked, and other units assigned (including Fire Rescue/EMS vehicles).
 - a. Based on available information, officers shall choose the quickest route based on traffic and weather conditions and congestion in the area of the accident.
 - b. Officers will drive safely to the scene, consistent with the need for a prompt response.

B. DUTIES OF FIRST OFFICER ON SCENE

1. When officers respond to a traffic scene, they shall perform the following minimum activities:
 - a. Upon arrival, park the police vehicle in such a way as to provide maximum protection to the scene, but without endangering the public;
 - b. Determine if there are any injuries, and if so, administer emergency medical care and/or provide basic life support pending arrival of Fire/Rescue;
 - c. Assess the scene to determine the need for emergency services and summon whatever services are needed;
 - d. Note special conditions or factors that may have contributed such as natural hazards, visibility obstruction, inoperative traffic control device(s), etc.;
 - e. Record short-lived evidence and protect the scene for evidence when the need for further investigation appears evident;
 - f. Locate and interview witnesses;
 - g. Notify the shift supervisor when supervisory assistance may be warranted;
 - h. Issue appropriate traffic citations when applicable;
 - i. Expedite the removal from the roadway of vehicles, persons, and debris; and
 - j. Prepare appropriate reports.
 - k. Additional Responsibilities:

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- 1) In the event of death, notification of kin will be accomplished in a timely and considerate manner by the Duty Supervisor or his/her designee;
- 2) In cases of injury at an accident scene, the investigating officer, when possible, will determine the desires of the injured person concerning notification of next of kin and relay this information to the Communications Center, who will notify the requested person by telephone.
- 3) At an involved party's request, an officer may request Communications to notify an emergency contact to respond to the scene or hospital. Further notifications on behalf of an injured person will be made by hospital personnel; and
- 4) The investigating officer will notify Communications immediately in the event any utility is disrupted because of an accident.

C. OFFICER IN CHARGE AT THE ACCIDENT SCENE

1. Unless otherwise directed by a supervisor, when more than one officer responds to a traffic accident scene, the officer in charge shall be the primary unit assigned by Communications, or the beat officer in the geographic area where the accident occurred.
2. Although officers will retain control of the scene, the care and control of injured persons will be left to authorized Fire/Rescue personnel upon their arrival.
3. Officers may make recommendations for placement of Fire/Rescue vehicles to protect the scene, injured persons, and workers/investigators, while still maintaining, if possible, a reasonable flow of traffic.
4. Control of the scene shall be released to other officers with special investigative skills appropriate to the accident if they are summoned to the scene by a supervisory officer.
5. Supervisory personnel will not normally assume command of the scene.
6. If an officer is involved in an accident, the officer will exercise control over the accident scene only until the arrival of an investigating or supervisory officer.

D. PROPERTY OF ACCIDENT VICTIMS

1. Any officer responsible for an accident investigation will ensure that any personal property of an accident victim will be secured for safekeeping and placed into property, utilizing the appropriate forms and reports.

E. COLLECTION OF ACCIDENT INFORMATION

1. When a traffic accident investigation is to be conducted, the following type of information and evidence shall be collected.
 - a. The officer will obtain identification and preliminary statements and/or interviews from involved drivers and witnesses.
 - b. Officers will question drivers and witnesses separately and individually concerning the accident and should request the witnesses to refrain from discussing the accident among them.
 - c. The driver involved in an accident who has been arrested shall be advised of his/her Miranda rights as appropriate.
 - d. Although questioning of drivers and witnesses can be done at the scene of minor accidents, in very

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serious accidents, the officer should consider conducting more in-depth questioning and/or taking statements at the police station facility.

- e. When questioning drivers, officers will be alert for signs of drug/alcohol, physical or emotional impairment which may have contributed to the accident.
- f. The officer will make a field examination of vehicle components for failure or damage, will match vehicle damage to the damage of other vehicles, other objects, and to marks on the road and will make appropriate records.
- g. Officers who note faulty equipment that warrants a more thorough investigation should place a hold on the vehicle for further examination by qualified personnel, particularly if the faulty equipment may have contributed to the accident.
- h. Officers shall carefully note if the damaged area(s) on the vehicle coincide with other evidence and statements as to how the accident occurred and should note areas of contact and induced damage to each vehicle.
- i. The officer will examine and record the effects of the accident on the roadway, including tire marks,
- j. Gouges, scuffs, etc. The officer should also note the road and weather conditions at the time of the accident.
- k. The officer will take measurements, as required, such as positions of vehicles, debris, vehicle damage areas, view obstructions, etc. The officer will collect and preserve evidence as necessary.
- l. The officer will be certain that information is exchanged among involved drivers/property owners.
- m. The officer will obtain any other information related to the accident that may be necessary for a complete investigation.

F. FATAL MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENTS

1. In the event of a fatal motor vehicle accident, or any accident in which serious or critical personal injury which might result in death is sustained, the shift supervisor shall request the assistance of an officer who has received specialized training in accident reconstruction.
 - a. Due to the complex and specialized nature of accident reconstruction, if a Department officer with this training is not available, the Maryland State Police shall be notified and requested to provide an officer with this training.
2. The basic accident report will be completed by the initial reporting officer. The accident reconstructionist will be responsible for:
 - a. Preservation and collection of evidence
 - b. Measurements of accident scene and final diagram
 - c. Detailed narrative as to the circumstances of the accident to include violations of motor vehicle laws which may have contributed to the accident.
 - d. Obtaining photographs of accident scene
 - e. Perform a background investigation on involved drivers to determine prior motor vehicle and criminal violations and whereabouts immediately preceding the incident which might have a bearing on the incident.

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- f. Any Department reports appropriate to the accident investigation to include, but not limited to, tow or property reports.
 - g. Securing the personal property of all fatally or critically injured individuals.
 - h. Securing the services of Maryland State Police, Automotive Safety Enforcement Division, when vehicle equipment (brakes, transmissions, etc.) are required to be checked for possible accident causation or contributing factors.
 - i. Preparation of case for screening with the Prince George's County State's Attorney's Office.
 - j. Ensure that the Communications Center personnel have the necessary details to issue the required TTY notifications.
 - k. Obtaining a copy of the Medical Examiner's report when available.
 - l. Follow up with all interested parties to this incident.
 - m. Obtaining written statements from all witnesses.
3. In the event of a fatal or potentially fatal motor vehicle accident, no traffic or criminal charges are to be filed.
- a. When appropriate, and after all required chemical tests for alcohol content have been completed, and required paperwork provided to the driver, the individual is to be released.
 - b. All charges relating to the incident will be filed by the State's Attorney's office after screening by the Accident Reconstructionist.

G. HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

1. Accidents involving hazardous materials are extremely dangerous and officers should use extreme caution when handling them.
 - a. Officers should attempt to remain at least 500 feet from the accident scene and identify the type of spill or leak as safely as possible.
 - b. The DOT Hazardous Material Handbook should be used to identify the contents of vehicles equipped with container placards.
 - c. Fireboard should be notified of the accident and type of hazardous material, if determined, as soon as possible.
 - d. Officers should protect the scene, close the roadway, and evacuate the immediate area if necessary or directed by Fireboard.
 - e. No officer should attempt to control a fire or hazardous material spill unless they have been properly trained and equipped to do so.

H. DOCUMENTATION/REPORTING OF ACCIDENTS

1. A Maryland Automated Accident Report (MAARS) shall be completed in accordance with MAARS guidelines which are part of the Department's Administrative Manual when the following conditions exist:
 - a. Any traffic accident involving death, personal injury or complaint of injury.
 - b. Property damage accidents when any vehicle Involved cannot be safely driven from the scene.
 - c. All hit and run accidents reported at the time of occurrence, not those for insurance purposes only.
 - d. Accident that may require enforcement action such as DWI, driving while suspended.

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- e. Required when an officer elects to issue a traffic citation.
 - f. When any City owned vehicles are involved.
 - g. When any citizen demands an accident report.
2. MAARS reports will then be submitted in accordance with MAARS guidelines and a copy sent to the Laurel Department of Public Works for a study of traffic engineering deficiencies.

4 / 303.25 GOVERNING LEGISTRATION AND REFERENCES

Maryland Automated Accident Reporting System
CALEA Standards 61.2.1, 61.2.2, 61.2.3, 61.2.4, 61.3.2, 82.2.1, 83.1.1, 83.2.6

4 / 303.30 ANNEX

General Order 4 / 303A, Crash Data Retrieval System