

Vehicle Crashes

9.02.01 PURPOSE

The purpose of this order is to establish guidelines for managing traffic crash scenes and set forth policy and procedure for the investigation and reporting of traffic crashes occurring within the City and County of San Francisco.

9.02.02 POLICY

- A. **Investigation and Report.** It is the policy of the San Francisco Police Department to investigate and report the following types of vehicle crashes:
1. All traffic crashes resulting in death or injury.
 2. All hit and run traffic crashes resulting in death, injury or property damage.
 3. All runaway vehicle crashes resulting in death, injury, or property damage.
 4. All traffic crashes involving a city-owned vehicle or damage to city owned property.
 5. All school bus crashes.
 6. All traffic crashes involving an arrest.
 7. When the driver of any involved vehicle is suspected of being under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
 8. All traffic injury crashes involving bicycles and pedestrians.
 9. All Autonomous Vehicle (AV) injury and non-injury crashes, where vehicle was physically driven or remotely monitored, shall be documented on a CHP 555 report.
- B. **Property Damage Only.** Members need not investigate or report non-injury (property damage) vehicle crashes that do not include any of the above-listed criteria.
- C. **Report Completion.** It is the policy of the San Francisco Police Department for its members to follow the California Highway Patrol's Crash Investigation Manual ("CIM") format to complete the Traffic Crash Report forms, diagrams, and narrative to provide a complete, accurate and standardized report.

Traffic reports must be submitted, complete, and in their entirety **prior to the member reporting off duty.**

Only the following exceptions may delay a report being turned in at the end of your shift:

1. A crash investigation of (1) considerable complexity and (2) the member's supervisor has full knowledge of the report's complexity.
2. The assigned investigator approves the extension needed to complete the report.
3. The investigating officer is waiting for known video of the crash.

All felony arrests documented in a traffic report (Hit & Run, DUI, etc.) shall be submitted before the member signs off duty and, in no case, beyond 24 hours from the time of assignment.

In cases where delays are expected for any reason, the member preparing the report shall submit a completed face page (CHP 555-1) with all involved party information and a brief synopsis of the crash to the Platoon Commander and explain the reason for the delay. The Platoon Commander will maintain this face page until the report is signed off only as reference for any interested party information requests.

All completed traffic reports shall be forwarded to Crime Information Services Unit (CISU).

9.02.03 PROCEDURES

The first unit(s) on scene of any crash has an obligation to render first aid if necessary, and when safe to do so, to any injured parties and summon additional medical resources as needed. Members will treat all crashes as potential crime scenes.

A. Injury

1. **Report.** When investigating crashes involving injuries, always complete the entire Traffic Crash Report, including a diagram of the crash scene.
2. **Notification.** If death or serious injury results, immediately notify the Traffic Collision Investigation Unit during business hours or the Department Operations Center at all other times (see DGO 8.01, *Critical Incident Evaluation and Notification*). Record the name and the star number of the person notified along with the time on the Traffic Report.
3. **Victim Identification.** Refer all requests for victim identification, by persons or the media, to the Department Operations Center, the Traffic Collision Investigation Unit, or the Medical Examiner's Office, if applicable (see DGO 8.09, *Media Relations*).
4. **Vehicle Holds.** See DGO 9.06, *Vehicle Tows*.

B. Bicycle

A bicycle rider is an involved party in a traffic crash if the crash occurs on a street, roadway, or highway (includes sidewalks). Members **shall** consider the following when investigating injury and non-injury traffic crashes involving bicyclists alone and/or with vehicles:

1. When any involved party is injured as the result of a traffic crash, members **shall** complete a traffic report. A complaint of pain by any involved party is sufficient to establish injury for traffic crash reporting purposes.
2. Medical attention by an ambulance crew or transportation to a medical facility **shall not** be used as a requirement for taking a crash report. The following are examples of traffic crashes requiring a traffic report:
 - a. Crashes involving a bicycle on a street, roadway, or highway involving a pedestrian, skateboarder, road hazards, another bicycle, and any object, including a parked vehicle.
 - b. Crashes involving the opening of a vehicle door in the immediate path of an approaching cyclist upon a roadway is deemed a crash. Even if the cyclist swerves and avoids the opening door, overturns, strikes another vehicle, person, or object in the process. This designation applies to a stopped or parked vehicle when the door is opened into traffic.
3. Members shall treat bicycle crashes not occurring on the highway and not involving a motor vehicle as 'Aided Cases' which shall be documented using incident report forms as well as a diagram on a CHP 555 form. The diagram shall be attached to the incident report. Members who receive complaints from bicyclists about a motorist forcing the bicyclist off the road or committing an assault **shall** document the incident using an incident report form; a traffic report is not required. However, should the incident lack the elements of an assault, and the reportee is insistent on reporting the incident, members **shall** document the incident using an incident report, not by using a CAD number.
4. Members should complete investigations and reports as appropriate and **shall not** dissuade bicycle riders from making traffic or incident reports. Injury crashes on a highway involving solo bicycles should be treated in the same manner as a solo motor vehicle crash and not merely as an unfortunate occurrence to the bicyclist.

C. Hit & Run Vehicle Crashes

1. **Report.** When requested by a party, investigate and prepare a Traffic Crash Report for all hit and run vehicle crashes occurring within San Francisco, whether you are at the scene or not.
2. **Notification.** If a death or serious injury has occurred, preserve the crash scene and notify the Traffic Collision Investigation Unit or the Department Operations Center.

D. Traffic Crash Scene Preservation

Members are reminded that a traffic crash scene may transition into a crime scene during the investigation. Therefore, preserving the condition of the scene and evidence related to the crash (i.e., clothing, beverage containers, the position of vehicles, seat positions, DNA, fingerprints, etc.) is essential when conducting a thorough and comprehensive investigation (see DGO 6.02, *Physical Evidence and Crime Scene Preservation*).

Determining the actions of involved parties prior to the crash (i.e., talking on a cell phone, being under the influence of alcohol/drugs, or experiencing a medical episode) may rest on evidence gathered at the scene and/or in the vehicles.

When a member determines that a traffic crash has transitioned into a crime scene, the member **shall** ensure the following steps are taken to preserve the scene until relieved by the investigating Supervisor:

1. Take appropriate measures to render the scene safe and prevent additional injuries or more crashes.
2. Request emergency medical assistance if injuries are apparent.
3. Secure the geographical area of the crash scene and restrict access to those who are engaged in emergency medical assistance or investigative duties.
4. Request a supervisor respond to the crash scene.
5. Initiate an incident log.
6. Notify supporting units (i.e., Traffic Company Officer / CVU Mapping Officer, TCIU Investigator, Media Relations, Crime Scene Investigations) during business hours or through the Department Operations Center after business hours.
7. Secure witnesses by requesting a driver's license, email, and contact phone numbers. Attempt to keep the witnesses separated until they are interviewed by investigators.

8. Canvass the area for the presence of video surveillance cameras at surrounding businesses, government facilities, etc., and provide the camera location information to investigators.
9. Re-open the area for public access only at the direction of the on-scene investigator.

If there is video evidence of the event, officers shall request a Video Retrieval Officer to process the video evidence.

If Traffic Company Officer, CVU Mapping Officer, and/or TCIU is responding to the scene and absent exigent circumstances, officers shall not move vehicles or enter vehicles or move any other evidence in an effort to preserve the integrity of the crime scene.

Traffic crashes with serious or fatal injuries involving city-owned vehicles, persons of notoriety, or persons involved in a serious crime may attract the media, City department supervisors, employee labor representatives, members of the City Attorney's Office, and other interested parties. Allowing non-law enforcement or non-medical personnel access into the crash scene for any reason while the investigation is ongoing may contaminate evidence, render the evidence useless, or result in the evidence being inadmissible in court.

All non-law enforcement and non-medical personnel, including the media, shall be restricted from entering the crime scene. However, members shall not intentionally impede a person's ability to observe, record, film, or photograph from the crime scene perimeter (see DGO 5.07, *Rights of Onlookers*).

In crashes with fatal injuries, members should make reasonable efforts to protect the decedent's privacy and dignity. Members are reminded that they may only take or use a photograph of the deceased for law enforcement purposes (PC 647.9).

E. Runaway Vehicle Accidents

When investigating a vehicle crash involving a parked vehicle in violation of Section 7.2.35 of the Transportation Code ("T.C."), prepare a Traffic Crash Report and include all of the following:

1. Whether the emergency brake was on or partially on.
2. The position of the gear selector (manual or automatic).
3. Whether the vehicle was locked.
4. Whether the vehicle may have been struck and set into motion by another vehicle.

Cite the vehicle 7.2.35 T.C. (no blocks) and tow it after placing a "hold" for the Commercial Vehicle Unit (see DGO 9.06, *Vehicle Tows*). Forward a completed traffic report copy to the Commercial Vehicle Unit. Direct the owner to the Traffic Company STOP window (415) 678-3625 to get a release.

F. City Owned Vehicles or Property

When investigating a crash involving a city-owned vehicle or property, attempt to notify the appropriate city department, e.g., Department of Electricity, Department of Public Works, etc., and write a traffic report. Minor non-injury crashes involving Muni may be investigated by Muni personnel.

G. School Bus Crashes

If the bus is occupied at the time of the crash and there are injuries, ensure that the Communications Division notifies the California Highway Patrol, who is required to handle the report. If the bus is not occupied, then the investigation will be conducted by any San Francisco Police Department officer.

H. Autonomous Vehicles

Technology evolves rapidly and, at times, faster than legislation or regulations can adapt to the changes. California allows Autonomous Vehicles (AVs) to pick up passengers, both with or without a safety driver or operator behind the steering wheel. The California Public Utilities Commission (PUC) and the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) have oversight of AVs.

Copies of AV crash reports will be sent to the Commercial Vehicle Unit.

I. Vehicle Crashes Involving an Arrest

After arresting a person involved in a vehicle crash, whether the arrest is related to the crash or is related to the previous commission of a crime, complete a Traffic Crash Report and an arrest incident report. When completing the incident report, reference the Traffic Crash Report.

J. Vehicle Crashes Involving Hazardous Materials; see DGO 8.07, *Hazardous Materials*.

K. Youth Involved in Traffic Crashes

For a youth, defined as 17 years or younger, who is party to a reportable traffic crash, collect the full name and address of the parent or guardian who signed and verified the youth's application for license or gave permission for the youth to drive.

L. Non-Injury Vehicle Crashes

When arriving at the scene of a non-injury vehicle crash, advise the involved parties that it is the policy of this department not to investigate or report vehicle crashes involving only property damage.

1. **Exchange of Information.** Ensure the proper exchange of the Collision Information Form (SFPD 19) and, if necessary, assist each party with its completion. In addition, ensure witness information is provided to the parties involved.
2. **Tows.** Arrange for tows and direct traffic if necessary.

If the individual insists on a report, the member should complete a CHP 555 report.

M. Citing at the Scene of a Traffic Crash; see DGO 9.01, *Traffic Enforcement*.

1. Only members who have completed the POST 40-hour Basic Traffic Course may issue a citation for violations at the scene of a crash.
2. Any member who has completed a POST academy can write any crash report regardless of their ability to issue a citation at at the scene of a crash.

References:

DGO 5.07 – Rights of Onlookers
DGO 8.07 – Hazardous Material Incidents
DGO 8.09 – Media Relations
DGO 9.01 – Traffic Enforcement
DGO 9.06 – Vehicle Tows