



# Alexandria Police Department

## Directive 11.1



# Traffic Crash Investigation

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### CONTENTS

11.1.01	PURPOSE/POLICY
11.1.02	AUTHORITY
11.1.03	REQUIRED REPORTS
11.1.04	RESPONSIBILITIES
11.1.05	PROCEDURES
11.1.06	CRASH RECONSTRUCTION TEAM

<b>11.1.01</b>	<b>PURPOSE / POLICY</b>
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The purpose of this directive is to establish a policy for the investigative procedures to be followed by members of the Department when investigating motor vehicle crashes; and to ensure the proper reports are filed and the appropriate action is taken.

An objective of the Department is the reduction of traffic crashes. To accomplish this, the Department performs a variety of functions such as providing emergency service to the injured, protecting the crash scene, conducting crash investigations and follow-ups, preparing reports, and taking proper enforcement action. The purpose of traffic crash investigation is to determine the cause of the crash and use the information to develop enforcement that will reduce crashes. Accident reports are used by the Department of Motor Vehicles, the Department of State Police, the Department of Transportation at the state level, and by the City to study the frequency of crashes at a given location and time, the causes, and the road conditions that existed at the time. The reports are also used to develop selective enforcement programs, engineering studies, and to promote street and highway safety.

<b>11.1.02</b>	<b>AUTHORITY</b>
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Statutory authority governing accident investigation is located in the Virginia Code, Chapter 3, Article 11, "Accident Reports", 46.2-371-388, and Chapter 8, Article 11, "Accidents", 46.2-894-902.

<b>11.1.03</b>	<b>REQUIRED REPORTS</b>
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<b>[61.2.1 a-f]</b>
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Virginia Code § 46.2-373 requires every law-enforcement officer who in the course of duty investigates a motor vehicle accident resulting in injury to or death of any person or total property damage to an apparent extent of **\$1,500** or more, either at the time of and at the scene of the accident or thereafter and elsewhere, by interviewing participants or witnesses shall, within twenty-four hours after completing the investigation, forward a written report of the accident to the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). The report shall include the name or names of the insurance carrier or of the insurance agent of the automobile liability policy on each vehicle involved in the accident. Crashes meeting the severity criteria occurring on public property are reportable to the DMV. Public property is considered to be highways, roads, streets and public parking lots maintained by state, county or municipal funds. Crashes occurring on private property, even though they may meet the severity criteria, are not reportable to the DMV.

Crashes that are clearly non-reportable based on the definition of severity or location should not be sent to the DMV.

Also, to reduce the number of supplemental reports, it is recommended that the [Police Crash Report](#) (FR300P) not be sent to the DMV until after completion of the crash investigation.

The following section lists the reports associated with traffic crash investigation required by the Police Department.

<b>On Public Property</b>	<b>APD-7</b>	<b>FR-300P</b>	<b>OTHER</b>
<b>\$1500</b> or more property damage		X	
Personal Injury		X	
Serious Injury (potential fatality)	X	X	
<i>City Property or Vehicle involved (with personal injury or \$1,500 or more property damage)</i>	X	X	
<i>City Property or Vehicle involved (No personal injury or less than \$1,500 property damage)</i>	X		
Hit & Run (minor damage)	X		
Hit & Run ( <b>\$1,500</b> or more property damage)	X	X	

On Private Property	APD-7	FR-300P	OTHER
<i>City Property or Vehicle involved</i>	X		
Serious Injury (potential fatality)	X	X	
Hit & Run	X		
Other	APD-7	FR-300P	OTHER
Hit & Run w/injury or <b>\$1500</b> damage to <b>attended</b> vehicle or property (Class 5 felony)	X	X	*Case Jacket
<b>FATALITY</b>	X	X	*Case Jacket

### \*Case Jackets

Case jacket for a Traffic Fatality will include:

1. A copy of the FR300P;
2. *Offense/Incident Report* (APD-7) (Indicate in the narrative who notified the next of kin);
3. Photographs (photographs of victim should be sealed);
4. Investigator's supplements;
5. All statements;
6. A copy of the VCIN required teletype message (Public property, fatality only);
7. Detailed sketch, with measurements; and
8. Autopsy report or a report from the Medical Examiner negating homicidal death.

The case jacket will be reviewed by the Information Services Section (ISS) Case Review Officer and forwarded to the Commonwealth's Attorney. When the case jacket is returned, Information Services will file it with the original APD-7.

### **11.1.04 RESPONSIBILITIES**

**[61.2.2 a-h]**

1. An officer shall respond to the following types of traffic crashes:
  - a. Death or injury.
  - b. Hit and run.
  - c. Impairment of an operator due to alcohol and drugs.
  - d. Any accident involving City property, vehicles, equipment, or facilities.
  - e. Hazardous material involved.
  - f. Disturbance between drivers or passengers.
  - g. Major traffic congestion created as a result of the crash.
  - h. Where vehicles are damaged to the extent that towing is required.
2. For crashes occurring at a location in the City where another agency has jurisdiction, i.e. G.W. Parkway or I-395, *Department of Emergency Communications (DEC)* will contact the appropriate agency. If the agency asks for assistance, an Alexandria officer will respond.

- a. I-95 and I-395: The Virginia Highway Act makes the State Police responsible for the Alexandria portion of I-95 and I-395 (including ramps). If the State Police are unable to respond, investigation is the responsibility of this Department.
  - b. George Washington Parkway: This Department investigates crashes on the highway from the southern City limits, north to Second Street. Crashes occurring north of Second Street to the City line are handled by this Department if the Park Police cannot respond.
3. In addition to situations requiring an investigation, officers may investigate any accident in which the officer believes an investigation will serve the Department's or the community's interest.
  4. If any person involved in a crash makes a claim of injury, at any time prior to the officer leaving the scene, the officer will complete the appropriate accident report.
  5. Officers will refrain from making any comment, to any party, relating to a claim of injury or civil liability at the scene of a traffic crash.
  6. Two decisions are made when an officer arrives at a crash scene and completes the preliminary investigation:
    - a. Is the crash reportable to DMV?
    - b. Is issuing a VUS necessary?
      1. If the crash is reportable to DMV and sufficient evidence exists to support prosecution, an FR-300P will be completed and a VUS will be issued.
      2. If the crash is not reportable to DMV, both parties will exchange the required information. The placing of charges is left to the discretion of the responding officer.
      3. Issuing a VUS will not compel the completion of an FR-300P.
  7. Supervisors are responsible to ensure that FR300Ps are completed when necessary. Supervisors will review all FR300Ps for accuracy and completeness.
  8. The on-duty patrol watch commander, or designee may temporarily suspend property damage accident investigations, i.e., during inclement weather or during an emergency, which reduces the Department's capability to handle calls for service.
  9. In all cases, the responding officer is responsible to ensure the proper information is exchanged between drivers. A Driver Information Exchange form (APD-373) should be used. The officer will write "No Report" in the comments block of the APD-373 in all cases where an FR-300P is not going to be filed with the Department or DMV. Officers will not provide an incident number or refer the drivers to ISS if no report is going to be filed.

## 11.1.05

## PROCEDURES

[61.2.3 a-f]

The primary officer (as designated by the dispatcher unless countermanded by a supervisor) is responsible for investigating the crash. The officer assigned to a crash shall have the responsibility and authority to request assistance as needed. He or she becomes the primary investigating officer in charge at the scene unless the supervisor deems it more appropriate to assign another officer these responsibilities, i.e., Crash Reconstruction Team called to the scene.

- A. The first officer to arrive at a crash scene shall perform the following:
1. Identify injured persons; administer emergency medical care (basic life support measures) pending arrival of rescue personnel.
  2. Identify and deal with fire hazards and/or hazardous materials.
  3. Summon additional help as required (officers, rescue, tow truck).
  4. Protect the collision scene.
  5. Preserve or collect short-lived evidence (broken parts, skid marks).
  6. Establish a safe traffic pattern around the scene.
  7. Locate witnesses and record key accident information.
  8. Expedite removal of vehicles, persons, and debris from the roadway except for fatal crashes.
  9. Control and protect property belonging to collision victims.

The patrol vehicle shall not be parked at the scene in a manner that will endanger other pedestrians, motorists, or citizens. The officer shall consider using the vehicle as a shield to protect the scene as well as him or her. The officer shall leave the vehicle emergency lights on if vehicles remain in the roadway.

During periods of reduced visibility or darkness, the officer shall wear a reflective safety vest when investigating the crash. Officers shall use flares or traffic cones as needed (available in each patrol vehicle), to create a warning pattern to alert other drivers. Note that flares may be dangerous at accidents where hazardous materials are present.

**B. Collecting information**

1. At the scene of the crash, the investigating officer shall gather appropriate information for a report. Information to be collected at the scene may include, but is not limited to, the following:

- a. Interview principals and witnesses and secure necessary identity/address information.
- b. Examine and record vehicle damage.
- c. Examine and record the effects of the accident on the roadway or off the roadway on private or public property.
- d. Take measurements as appropriate
- e. Take photographs as appropriate.
- f. Collect and process evidence.
- g. Exchange information among principals.

**C. Follow-up activities****[61.2.4]**

1. Follow-up activities that may be necessary include the following:
  - a. Obtain and record formal statements from witnesses.
  - b. Reconstruct the crash.
  - c. Submit evidentiary materials for laboratory examination.
  - d. Prepare accident or offense reports to support charges arising from the crash.
2. In a particularly serious crash involving severe injuries, fatalities, or multiple vehicles, it may be necessary to summon expert or technical assistance from photographers, surveyors, mechanics, physicians, Crash Team Reconstructionists, or other specialists.
3. At the crash scene, the officer may take immediate enforcement action and issue a Virginia Uniform Summons. In death cases, the Commonwealth's Attorney will decide the appropriate charge.
4. If the investigating officer concludes that a person driving under the influence of intoxicants caused the crash, also follow the direction found in Police Directive 11.8 (DWI Enforcement).
5. A Virginia Uniform Summons (VUS) based upon crash investigation, regardless of whether an FR300P is completed, may be issued only at the scene of a crash or at a hospital or medical facility to which any person involved in the crash has been transported. In any other case, the appropriate summons must be obtained from a magistrate. (§ 19.2-81)

#### **D. Crash scene hazards**

1. In case of fire danger from leaking or ruptured gas tanks or where the crash may involve hazardous materials, the on-scene officer shall summon the Fire Department. See Police Directive 13.2 for further guidance on handling hazardous materials.
2. The Mobile Data Browser is equipped with a copy of the current emergency response guidebook to aid in identifying vehicles carrying hazardous materials. The guidebook illustrates hazardous materials placards and identifies and describes the relevant hazard, appropriate emergency procedures, and evacuation procedures.
3. Any officer arriving at the scene of such a crash who sees hazardous materials placards shall immediately summon the Fire Department. The fire chief will assume control of any scene involving hazardous materials and all officers shall provide support as required. The investigation of the crash shall begin after approval by the fire chief.
4. Virginia Code § 18.2-324 requires any person clearing a wrecked or damaged vehicle from a highway to remove any glass or other injurious substance dropped upon the highway. Where the quantity of debris is too great for the wrecker operator to do this, personnel from City Solid Waste Division shall be requested. The Fire Department shall be called to assist in washing down combustible substances.

#### **E. Accident reports**

All FR-300Ps and related reports are to be completed by the investigating officer prior to ending their tour of duty, **unless an extension is approved by the on-duty watch commander**. A matrix of required reports is found in 11.01.03.

#### **F. Notification of Next of Kin in Personal Injury Accidents**

[55.2.6]

1. The primary officer must attempt to notify next of kin of any injured person in an accident who is unable to do so themselves. This information is to be documented in the APD-7 if one is required.
2. If the primary officer has not made contact with the next of kin by the end of his or her shift, the officer will notify the hospital staff that attempts to notify the next of kin were unsuccessful. The primary officer will also notify a supervisor on the relieving shift to assist with notification. In the event notification of the next of kin is not accomplished by the end of the relieving shift, CIS will be contacted and an investigator will be assigned to locate the next of kin.

3. If an offense/incident report (APD-7) is written, the primary officer should document in the APD-7 the name and phone number of the hospital official notified and the supervisor notified. If an APD-7 is not required for the accident investigation, the officer should document this information in his or her notebook.

#### 11.1.06 CRASH RECONSTRUCTION TEAM

The Crash Reconstruction Team provides current and highly technical investigation methods for all fatal or critical injury (possible loss of life or limb) traffic crashes. The team provides 24-hour call out availability.

A Crash Reconstructionist shall respond to all fatal or critical injury traffic crashes at the request of the Watch Commander or designee.

#### PROCEDURES:

- A. In the event of a critical injury traffic crash (where there is a confirmed or possible loss of life, limb, or permanent disfigurement) the primary officer shall notify a supervisor and secure the scene.
- B. The first supervisor on the scene should consider the severity of the crash, the obvious injuries to the occupants/pedestrians, the existence of skid marks and other measurable evidence, and the potential for criminal charges, when determining whether the services of the crash team are needed.  
The first supervisor on the scene will also evaluate the crash and confer with the Patrol Division Commander about requesting a Crash Reconstructionist. The Patrol Division Commander shall then notify *DEC* and direct the activation of the Crash Reconstruction Team. **[61.2.2.a]**
- C. *DEC* will:
  1. Send a group page to the "Crash Reconst" group in the event of any request for team services, even when an on-duty reconstructionist is available. It is the team's policy to provide at least two Crash Reconstructionists for all callouts. *DEC* will coordinate the response by providing the members with the current staffing available.
  2. Inform the Crash Reconstructionist of the location of the crash and the number of vehicles involved.
  3. Dispatch a Crime Scene Investigator to the scene of the crash. **[61.2.3]**
- D. The Patrol Watch Commander or their designee will ensure notification of the Commonwealth's Attorney of all fatality accidents.



- E. The Crash Reconstructionist will inform *DEC* of his/her estimated time of arrival and respond to Police Headquarters. One of the officers will transport the Team equipment to the scene. If the Crash Reconstructionist is on-duty, he/she will respond directly to the scene.
- F. The crash scene shall be protected and secured as a crime scene until the Crash Reconstructionist indicates otherwise. **[61.2.3]**
- G. Prior to the arrival of the Crash Reconstructionist, an officer will be assigned to initiate an Incident Report (APD-7). All available information shall be included in this report and any necessary supplements. The initial report will be signed by a supervisor and a copy will be provided to the Reconstructionist. The Crash Reconstructionist will be responsible for supplementing the primary officer's initial reports, completing the FR-300 and placing appropriate charges after conferring with the Commonwealth's Attorney. **[61.2.4]**
- H. Once on the scene, the Crash Reconstructionist will meet with the on-scene supervisor, the primary patrol officer and the evidence technician. The Crash Reconstructionist will take charge of the investigation with the assistance of the on-scene supervisor. The Crash Reconstructionist will:
1. inform the supervisor of any additional equipment that may be needed;
  2. ensure the scene and all vehicles involved are examined and photographed;
  3. take measurements and field sketch relating to the vehicles and any evidence;
  4. determine which vehicles will be held for evidence;
  5. examine the road surface for any physical evidence and determine the coefficient of friction by way of conducting skid tests if needed;
  6. thoroughly examine all vehicles involved;
  7. ensure that holds are placed on any vehicle needed for evidence;
  8. collect all evidence and ensure that it is turned into the Property Section;
  9. conduct follow-up interviews as necessary;
  10. attend the autopsy of all victims involved in the accident and request an autopsy report from the medical examiner, when completed;
  11. supplement all initial reports and complete a case jacket, ensuring that all morgue photographs of victims are in sealed envelopes;

12. discuss the case with the Commonwealth's Attorney if criminal charges are applicable; and
  13. refer any concerns or suggestions to the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services on roadway deficiencies.
- I. Should the condition of the patient improve to the degree that reconstruction is no longer needed, the on-scene supervisor should relieve the reconstruction team and reassign the investigation to the primary patrol officer.
  - J. The Crash Reconstruction Team Supervisor will maintain an on-call schedule. Team members will carry Department issued pagers and will notify the supervisor when they are unavailable for on-call status.

**By Authority Of:**

**Earl L. Cook**  
**Chief of Police**