

**OKALOOSA COUNTY
EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES
STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE**

Title:	Vehicle Operations
Policy:	407.00
Purpose:	To provide uniform driving guidelines for the safe operation of Okaloosa County EMS vehicles.

Policy:

Guidelines

All drivers of OCEMS vehicles will meet the qualifications and motor vehicle records requirements as outlined in Human Resource Policy Manual: Use of County Vehicles and in accordance with Florida Statue 401 and the corresponding Florida Administrative Code.

All drivers of OCEMS emergency vehicles will have successfully completed an Emergency Vehicle Operations Course before operating any department vehicle. All guidance provided in these courses will be followed.

Employees must immediately report in writing any revocation, suspension or loss of driver's license to the on-duty Shift Commander.

Employees must report within 1 hour of reporting to work, in writing, convictions and / or citations for violations of motor vehicle traffic laws and ordinances other than parking violations, in any vehicle, to the on-duty supervisor. The report will include copies of all available citation / arrest paperwork. The written report will include an explanation of the circumstances surrounding the citation / arrest.

Training

All new employees will be required to have complete an EVOC driver's training program prior to hire date or shortly after hire date (driving of any county vehicle is prohibited until a 16 hour EVOC course is obtained). Periodic training will also be provided for experienced drivers. Driver training reinforces good driving habits.

1. Initial training

All employees at the time of hire, will be introduced to the type of vehicles which they will be operating and its specialty equipment and safeguards. If more than one type of vehicle will be used, introduction to all equipment will be done. All new drivers will demonstrate competence in safe driving with a Field Trainer before being allowed to routinely drive. As part of their field training and orientation, drivers will need to respond to a minimum of 10 calls prior to being given full driving privileges.

Initial training will be completed as part of the OCEMS new employee orientation program. It will include the following components:

- Vehicle Inspection – The trainer will explain why and when vehicles should be inspected. The inspection of the vehicle will be demonstrated to the new employee. The new employee will then perform the inspection under the supervision of the trainer.
- Operating Techniques – Instruction will be given to allow the driver to become familiar with operating and using the equipment / vehicles.

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- Training Exercises – After operating techniques have been learned, the new employee should work on developing proficiency in operating the vehicle and equipment.
- Governmental Rules & Regulations - All appropriate rules and regulations will be reviewed with the driver. Emphasis will be given regarding safe vehicle operations.
- Accident Reporting Procedures – A review of procedures developed for handling accidents will be conducted. This review will include familiarization with accident reporting forms, accident review procedures and possible disciplinary actions.
- Emergency Procedures – How to handle: fires (including fire extinguisher use), mechanical failures and other potential emergencies.

Periodic Training

Periodic training of all drivers is necessary:

- To reinforce County policies and procedures.
- When County policies and procedures have changed.
- As a result of changes in vehicles, equipment, products or regulations.
- As a result of specific accident trends, high frequency or high severity of accidents within the fleet.
- As a part of disciplinary procedures for a driver involved in an accident or for a driving violation.

Training documentation

All training will be documented in writing and maintained by the Shift Training Officers at OCEMS.

INSPECTIONS

All employees shall perform a safety check each day of any vehicle they are assigned to drive. These checks will be documented on the check-in sheet. The safety check will include:

- Windshield washers and wipers
- Directional signals / turn signals
- Tires – check for adequate inflation, damage and tread wear.
- Lights – all lights must be checked, inside and out, including dash lights. Check both high and low beam headlights.
- Horn
- Brakes – When testing the brakes the engine will be on. They shall be tested by putting the vehicle in gear and applying the brakes to bring the vehicle to a stop. When the pedal is depressed it should move smoothly. When released the pedal should return to the complete raised position. When stopping there should not be any pulling to either side, grinding sounds or return pressure felt in the brake pedal. If brakes fade or any of the above symptoms are noted immediately notify Logistics or the Shift Supervisor and take the unit out of service.
- Parking brake – The vehicle should not roll either forward or backward when the parking brake is applied.
- Back-up alarm
- Emergency lights
- Siren
- Date / mileage due of next preventive maintenance. – Vehicles that are found to be due for preventive maintenance will be immediately reported to logistics.

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- Damage to the vehicle – all vehicles will be evaluated for damage at the beginning of the shift. Upon return of the vehicle it will be inspected for new damage. Damage not previously noted will be assumed to have occurred during the employee’s use of the vehicle. If new damage is noted it will be immediately reported in writing to the shift supervisor.
- Motor oil
- Brake fluid
- Power steering fluid – should be checked while the vehicle is on a level surface and when the engine is warm but not running.
- Hydraulic systems
- Automatic transmission fluid
- Cooling system reservoir
- Seatbelts – assure they are in proper working order. Buckles must lock into place and release when the button is depressed. Straps must not be ripped, torn or frayed.
- Equipment – assure that all equipment is stored and secured in its proper place. Make certain that nothing can loosen and become a “missile” hazard in the event of a quick stop. Employees must assure that the vehicle is in safe operating condition at all times. Gauges will be monitored when the vehicle is in operation. If any gauge indicates an abnormality the vehicle must be taken out of service as soon as possible. All defects or deficiencies shall be immediately reported to the shift supervisor.

VEHICLE MAINTENANCE

- All vehicle maintenance and records of maintenance is the responsibility of Okaloosa County Fleet Management.
- Repairs, adjustments, alterations and modifications to equipment will be carried out only by qualified persons specifically authorized by Okaloosa County. No employee of OCEMS is to undertake such work unless authorized.
- In the event of vehicle / equipment malfunction, corrective measures on the part of OCEMS personnel will be limited to verification that power exists and that all operating controls are in a normal configuration. If such action does not correct the malfunction, the problem will be referred to authorized service personnel.
- All malfunctioning vehicles and vehicle equipment will be reported to the Shift Commander. No vehicle perceived to be unsafe will be driven until checked and repaired or deemed safe by Okaloosa County Fleet or the Shift Supervisor on duty.
- If a critical vehicle malfunction occurs while responding to a call or transporting a patient the crew will immediately notify control to dispatch another unit. The Shift Commander will be notified to assure that the patient is cared for and to coordinate towing and repairs. The crew will complete an incident report and provide it to the Shift Commander.

SAFE DRIVING

Before driving

- A good mental attitude is essential for safe driving. A chip on your shoulder, a bad temper, irritations caused by other drivers, personal worries, fighting traffic and aggressive driving are all out of place for safe driving.
- Make all adjustments for safe driving such as seat, inside and outside mirrors and sitting position before putting the vehicle into gear.

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- All persons who drive or ride in County vehicles will in all cases wear the installed seat belt. The only exception is an attendant in the rear of an ambulance who is administering patient care that would not otherwise be able to be administered if the seat belt were worn.
- Never take drugs or strong medication before operating a vehicle. Drugs, illness or extreme fatigue may affect an employee's ability to judge distance, speed and driving conditions.
- Nothing is to be stored on the dashboard (i.e. coffee cups, clip board, papers, etc)

Starting

- Signal your intention.
- Wait for traffic to clear
- Avoid jack-rabbit starts...they may injure an occupant and will damage the vehicle

On the road

- All drivers will abide by all federal and state laws and County policies.
- Use of cellular / mobile phones is prohibited while driving County vehicles.
- Always be prepared to make emergency stops or take evasive action.
- The speed limit is a prudent safety limit. The posted speed limit will not be exceeded except during emergency responses as outlined in this policy.
- Check mirrors and gauges frequently.
- Shift your vision from point to point.
- Do not drive too close to the vehicle ahead. Keep a distance of at least four seconds between you and the vehicle in front of you.
- Slow down at intersections. Anticipate turns by other drivers.
- Do not jump yellow traffic lights.
- Slow down for curves and accelerate as you reach the straight. Remember that ambulances are top heavy and can overturn as a result of swerving.
- Never assume you have been seen or heard. Conversation, radios, closed windows and closed minds all may prevent drivers from seeing or hearing your vehicle until the last moment. Prepare yourself accordingly.
- Respect the right of way of others before asking that they yield to you. Watch for signs of movement. Do not assume the right-of-way. The driver who has the last chance to avoid an accident may be the driver in the legal right.
- Keep a distance behind other vehicles to avoid tailgating. Do not allow others to tailgate. Slow down, pull over to the side and let the tailgater pass.
- Watch for and yield to pedestrians, especially at crosswalks and between parked cars. Small children and old or incapacitated persons are completely unpredictable.
- Drivers must be particularly alert while driving near children. Children must be kept from playing in or about County vehicles. While in areas such as schools, parks, playgrounds, swimming pools or community centers be especially watchful for children and drive carefully and slowly.
- Lookout for animals and avoid them whenever possible. Never jeopardize your patient or vehicle by swerving or braking violently to avoid an animal.
- Watch the hidden lane of traffic at intersections. Vehicles in that lane may not see or hear you. Be visible at all times. Turn on low beam headlights at all times the vehicle is operated.

Passing

- Pass only when your view is clear well ahead and never on a solid yellow line.
- Make sure the vehicle behind you is not about to pass
- Signal by flashing your high beam headlights

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- Use extreme care when passing by crossing the median and driving in the wrong lane. This will only be done while traveling in emergency mode with lights and siren on.
- Convex mirrors provide deceptive spatial positioning. Do not use them to judge position of your vehicle in relation to other vehicles.

Turning

- Signal intentions at least 100 feet in advance, including changes in lane and actual changes in direction.
- Check blind spots and mirrors before turning
- Look ahead and behind several times before turning
- Learn blind spots and compensate for them

Stopping / breaking

- Anticipate your stop and signal your intention.
- Use pumping or press and release action when braking.
- Stop gently, remember your patient and partner.
- Avoid sudden braking. Instead of sudden hard braking continue past and go back. Remember a vehicle may be right behind you that you don't see

Parking

- Vehicles on calls should be left running.
- When possible do not park in moving traffic lanes.
- Leave emergency warning lights on when parked in the flow of traffic
- Before leaving the vehicle place the vehicle in park and engage the parking brake.
- Engage the high idle.
- If parked on a downgrade the front wheels should be turned towards the curb.
- If parked on an upgrade the front wheels should be turned away from the curb.

Night driving

- Do not overdrive your headlights.
- Keep headlights and windshield clean.
- Dim headlights for oncoming traffic.
- Distant tail lights are deceiving. Slow down until you are sure of distance.
- Keep alert for pedestrians, unlighted vehicles, vehicles with one headlight, bicycles, motorcycles and animals.

Weather hazards

- Do not drive through moving water
- Use caution when leaving the roadway – making sure the ground can handle the weight of the ambulance and you won't get stuck. You and the patient are better off if you have to park on a hard surface and walk to the patient. This will prevent delays in care and or transport.
- Do not drive too fast for existing conditions.
- Do not make hard stops or turns on roads that are slippery, wet, icy oil slicked.
- In obscured vision situations slow down, be alert and use hazard warning flashers. Turning off a portion of your emergency lights during heavy fog or rain may improve visibility and decrease reflective glare.

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BACKING PROCEDURE

- To ensure the safety of pedestrians and for the protection of property in the vicinity of OCEMS ambulances operating in reverse all personnel are required to follow this procedure when the ambulance is proceeding in reverse mode.
- The ambulance will not be put into reverse until someone is outside the ambulance on the driver's side rear. This person is responsible to make sure that the area directly behind, along with the sides and top of the ambulance is clear of all objects and persons. This section includes vehicles with back-up cameras installed.
- The driver of the unit will keep their window down and the AM/FM radio off while backing the ambulance to ensure better communication and vision.
- Direct eye contact must be made between the driver of the ambulance and the person responsible for backing them up. If the driver cannot see the spotter, they should immediately stop the ambulance to avoid hitting the spotter.
- Auxiliary lights such as the side scene lights should be used if necessary to illuminate all areas near the ambulance.
- Side mirrors shall be free of water, dirt and debris to allow for maximum visibility by the driver.
- Verbal communication between the driver and spotter at the rear of the unit shall be maintained. Use of the two way radio should not be used.
- Hand signals consistent with the direction of travel and stopping will be used by the spotter at all times.
- If a crew member attending the patient is unable to direct the driver, the driver should immediately seek the help of another individual who is on scene. If the situation arises where there is absolutely no one to direct the ambulance driver the driver should inspect the path of travel to the rear of the ambulance before moving the ambulance in reverse. When moving in reverse the crewmember in the patient compartment should proceed to the rear door windows and clear the travel area to the rear of the ambulance. This should only be done in extreme circumstances when no other alternative exists.
- Back up slowly and with caution.

RESPONDING TO EMERGENCIES

- Vehicles responding to an emergency call will utilize both audible and visual warning devices (lights and sirens) except when contraindicated for safety.
- Give traffic a chance to clear itself before pushing through. Weaving in and out of various traffic lanes is exceedingly dangerous.
- Florida Statutes 316.126 (3) say "Any authorized emergency vehicle when enroute to meet an existing emergency, shall warn all other vehicular traffic along the emergency route by an audible signal, siren, exhaust whistle, or other adequate device or by a visible signal by the use of displayed blue or red lights.. While en route to such emergency, the emergency vehicle shall otherwise proceed in a manner consistent with the laws regulating vehicular traffic upon the highways of this state." Keeping this in mind, when making emergency response between 11:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. in residential areas, if there is no apparent vehicular traffic and the unit is traveling at posted speed limits, the use of sirens is not mandatory. Safe operation of the ambulance must be the primary objective of the driver at all times. When in doubt concerning the use of the sirens, always choose to use the sirens.
- When making emergency response with lights and sirens, although the statues specify the posted speed limits may be exceeded, the driver must always take weather, road and traffic conditions

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into consideration. The statute specifically “does not relieve the driver from the responsibility to drive with due regard for the safety of all persons” (316.126 (5)). Unnecessary and unreasonable excessive speeds shall be avoided.

- The AM/FM radio will be turned off during emergency responses and while transporting patients.
- Drivers will be alert for other emergency vehicles responding.
- When a two person crew is responding they will work as a team. The front seat passenger will note the location of the incident, locate it in the map book and provide directions to the driver as needed. They will serve as a second set of eyes watching for hazards, other vehicles and pedestrians and will communicate such to the driver. The passenger should operate the two way radio and siren to avoid distractions to the driver.
- Use of cellular / mobile phones will be limited to calls necessary to get information from control or dispatch. They will be used in hands free mode and will be operated by the passenger when present.
- Use caution when beginning siren in traffic. If sirens are suddenly turned on, the drivers in the immediate vicinity may be startled and panic.
- Driving on the wrong side of the road, crossing medians and driving the wrong way on one-way streets will be done in cases of necessity and with extreme caution. Resort to this only when there is no other way to get through. Drivers will be prepared to justify their actions.
- When driving to an emergency all drivers of emergency vehicles will come to a full and complete stop at all red lights and stop signs. After ascertaining that all other traffic has yielded to the emergency vehicle, the vehicle may proceed through the intersection with due regard for the safety of others.
- Posted speed limits in school zone must be observed when children are present.
- Emergency vehicles will not pass a school bus when the school bus is loading or unloading students as indicated by the flashing red lights on the school bus until cleared to do so by the driver of the bus. At that time the emergency vehicle will proceed with extreme caution.
- Upon arrival at the scene of an incident, emergency vehicles will be parked at a safe distance from any hazard and in such a manner as not to cause obstructions to other emergency vehicles responding to the scene. Vehicles will, unless otherwise contraindicated for reasons of safety or security, remain idling at all times. Turn off white lights and head lights at night, unless they are deemed necessary for safety.
- At Haz-Mat scenes the unit should be parked at a distance and location indicated by a Haz-Mat team officer. In the absences of such an officer the crew should use information contained in their North American Emergency Response Guidebook to determine where to position the unit.
- Ambulances transporting patients to an emergency care facility may use emergency lights and sirens in circumstances involving patients with life-threatening or potentially life-threatening illness or injuries at the discretion of the paramedic in charge of patient care.
- Ambulances may only be operated by OCEMS employees, regardless of Code return.

ACCIDENTS & EMERGENCIES

- All accidents, no matter how minor, involving County owned vehicles will be immediately reported to the Communications Center and shift supervisor. Employees will follow the policy on handling and reporting accidents as outlined in the Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners Human Resource Manual. This includes mandatory drug and alcohol testing of drivers as outlined. County employees involved in accidents while utilizing a County – owned vehicle is to only discuss the accident with the investigating law enforcement officer or an agent of Okaloosa County. Do not offer an admission of guilt.

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- If an ambulance is involved in an accident while transporting a patient:
 1. Immediately notify control of the situation and request additional resources and the on duty supervisor to respond.
 2. Notify the Communications Center immediately with the following information:
 - a. The location of the accident.
 - b. Any injuries resulting from the accident.
 - c. Whether or not additional assistance is required (e.g., police, fire department or an additional ambulance to transport a patient).
 - d. The extent of damage to the vehicle(s) and/or other property.
 3. Check the status of the crew and patient and provide first aid as required. If injured and it is safe to do so remain where you are, don't further injure yourself trying to provide care for others.
 4. Check the status of the other parties involved and provide first aid as required. Their care will be immediately turned over to other responding units when they arrive on the scene.
 5. Warn other motorists of the accident by using warning devices.
 6. Ensure the safety of everyone involved.
 7. Evacuate the ambulance if it is not safe for the patient or crew to remain in the ambulance.
 8. If it is safe for the patient and crew to remain in the ambulance, keep the patient in the ambulance until the back-up units arrive to provide assistance.
 9. Transfer the patient being transported to another unit for continuation of care / transport.
 10. Do not discuss any information regarding the accident with anyone except law enforcement and the assigned Shift Commander. Do not accept responsibility for the accident. This will be determined by law enforcement.
 11. Obtain the following information from the other driver(s).
 - a. Name, address and phone number.
 - b. Make, model and vehicle license number.
 - c. Insurance Company, policy number and agent name.
 12. Obtain the names, addresses and phone numbers of any witnesses.
 13. Dispatch will log the exact time and location of the accident.
 14. The crew must remain at the scene until released by law enforcement. After the investigation is over, write a detailed description of what happened on an accident report. Draw a detailed picture of the scene on the form where indicated. Submit the completed form to the Shift Commander by the end of your shift. You may not leave work until this is done, unless medically necessary.

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- If an emergency vehicle is involved in an accident other than while transporting a patient:
 1. Immediately notify control of the situation and request additional resources and the on duty supervisor to respond to assist you. If responding to a call request that another unit be sent to that call.
 2. Notify the Communications Center immediately with the following information:
 - a. The location of the accident.
 - b. Any injuries resulting from the accident.
 - c. Whether or not additional assistance is required (e.g., police, fire department or an additional ambulance to transport a patient).
 - d. The extent of damage to the vehicle(s) and/or other property.
 3. Check the status of the crew and provide first aid as required. If injured and it is safe to do so remain where you are, don't further injure yourself trying to provide care for others.
 4. Check the status of the other parties involved and provide first aid as required. Their care will be immediately turned over to other responding units when they arrive on the scene.
 5. Warn other motorists of the accident by using warning devices.
 6. Ensure the safety of everyone involved.
 7. Evacuate the ambulance if it is not safe for the crew to remain in the ambulance.
 8. Do not discuss any information regarding the accident with anyone except law enforcement and the assigned Shift Commander. Do not accept responsibility for the accident. This will be determined by law enforcement.
 9. Obtain the following information from the other driver(s).
 - a. Name, address and phone number.
 - b. Make, model and vehicle license number.
 - c. Insurance Company, policy number and agent name.
 10. Obtain the names, addresses and phone numbers of any witnesses.
 11. Dispatch will log the exact time and location of the accident.
 12. The crew must remain at the scene until released by law enforcement. After the investigation is over, write a detailed description of what happened on an accident report. Draw a detailed picture of the scene on the form where indicated. Submit the completed form to the Shift Commander by the end of your shift. You may not leave work until this is done, unless medically necessary.

If a fire occurs on board any County vehicle the crew will assure that all passengers are immediately evacuated. Only after everyone's safety is assured and in cases of small fires should the crew attempt to extinguish the fire. Do not attempt to extinguish any fuel fires. If you smell fuels vapors or observe fuel leaking:

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- Stop the unit
 1. Turn off all electrical systems
 2. Remove the patients, passengers and crew from the unit
 3. Keep the area clear
 4. Immediately notify the Shift Supervisor
 5. Request additional unit as needed to transport patient or respond to call,

Accountability and Compliance:

1. A 16 hour EVOC course will be obtained and placed in the personel file of all new hires
2. A 3 hour refreshser EVOC course will be provided to all OCEMS staff bi-annually.
3. It is the responsibility of all employees to use sound judgment and safe driving techniques when operating any EMS vehicle.
4. Shift Commanders will investigate 100% of EMS vehicle accidents and report the findings to the EMS Division Chief as they occur. A summary of all accidents and their determined causes will be reported quarterly.
5. Drug and alcohol testing will be conducted in accordance with Okaloosa County policy. Human Resources Policy XXIII states that employees who have contributed to an accident with injury to a person or persons that requires a physician's care or where damage to property in the amount of \$1,000 or greater has occurred, will be required to submit to drug screening.

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