



Administrative Directive

Title: Emergency Response System/Vehicle Response Directive		Index Number: AD 5.09
Date of Adoption: 11/30/07	Date of Revision:	Page 1 of 4

1.0 **Purpose and Need**

To establish protocol for response to calls for service in order to ensure safe, rapid and orderly response to calls for service.

Note: This directive is intended to provide guidance to public safety personnel with respect to operation of vehicles responding to emergency situations so that those personnel may be fairly informed of departmental expectations. As such, this directive is intended for internal City use only and is not intended to establish, or in any manner define or expand, the applicable standard of care for purposes of civil tort liability.

2.0 **Administrative Directive**

Public Safety personnel must set an example for the public concerning safe driving practices and policies. The laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia apply equally to operators of emergency vehicles and to private citizens in all respects with the few exceptions set forth in the Code of Virginia. These exempt emergency vehicle operators from certain criminal prosecutions, providing they operate within the framework of the provisions. Public Safety personnel operating an emergency vehicle either under routine or emergency conditions shall do so in accordance with the Code of Virginia.

The laws do not exempt an emergency vehicle operator from civil liability, regardless of his authority to operate a vehicle under emergency conditions. Careful and prudent action in operating emergency vehicles is always the rule; there are no exceptions to this philosophy in spite of our demanding responsibilities and our exemption from criminal prosecution under certain circumstances as provided by law.

On occasion, emergency vehicles are involved in crashes that result in property damage or personal injuries. Most crashes can be prevented if operators use care and prudence that is expected when operating emergency equipment.

Crashes involving emergency response equipment and personnel will be thoroughly investigated. If negligence, or lack of responsible thinking, on the part of the operator is established, disciplinary action will be taken as provided for in the Rules, Regulations and Policies of the department. *All accidents involving emergency vehicles will be reported in accordance with City of Virginia Beach Administrative Directive 5.01 (Fleet Asset Operation).*

3.0 **Procedure to Accomplish Administrative Directive**

For the purpose of this section, an emergency will be deemed to exist only in situations where:

- There is an indication that violence, *illness* or injury exists and will likely continue or worsen.
- If the escape of an individual poses an immediate threat to the safety of others (*Police only*).
- Where a need prevails for immediate action to ensure continued protection of life and property.

Routine calls are those commonplace calls that indicate no emergency as described above.

Only emergency vehicles equipped with a siren and one or more emergency lights will be operated as an emergency vehicle.

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RESPONSE MODE

When calls are received in the E911 Emergency Communications Center, it will be impossible to define every situation and indicate the appropriate priority for each incident. Therefore, judgments will have to be made based on the information received at the time the call is received. Priority codes, as assigned by Emergency Communications and Citizens Services, shall not be reduced since the purpose of this code is to indicate to responders the seriousness of the call; however, emergency personnel shall determine the reasonable response mode based on the information provided to them at the time the call is dispatched, upon prior knowledge from similar incidents at the same location *or upon receiving amplifying information from responders at the incident scene. Responders shall also consider the proximity and level of service available onboard other responding apparatus.* It is the responsibility of the assigned unit(s) to respond accordingly, taking into consideration the road conditions, traffic density, visibility and time of day.

Individual departmental supervisors have the authority to mandate non-emergency responses for any call(s) based on prevailing road and weather conditions. Emergency Medical Services (EMS) supervisors may also alter the response mode to any EMS call based on information received from emergency medical personnel who have arrived on scene and completed a patient assessment.

Emergency Mode – Response:

When the E911 Communications Division assigns a call and designates it as a PRIORITY 1 or 2 incident, the vehicle operator(s) assigned will activate emergency lights and siren and respond as quickly as practical with due regard for the safety of himself/herself and others considering traffic density, weather conditions, and visibility. *When approaching a controlled intersection (i.e., traffic light, stop sign, yield sign, etc.) in which the emergency vehicle would be required to yield the right-of-way in normal operating conditions, the vehicle operator shall slow the vehicle sufficiently to be capable of coming to a complete stop before entering the intersection and before entering each lane of crossing traffic within the intersection.* The purpose of coming to a near or complete stop is to enable the operator to ascertain that all opposing traffic has acknowledged the emergency signals and yielded the right-of-way to the emergency vehicle so that the crossing can be made safely.

As outlined in the State Code, emergency vehicles are authorized to exceed posted speed limits when operating in the emergency mode using due regard for safety. However, unless authorized by a duly designated superior on a case-by-case basis, traveling greater than 20 mph over the posted speed limit is not permitted. In areas with posted speed limits of 35 mph or less, a maximum speed of 10 mph over the posted speed limit shall be permitted unless a greater speed is expressly authorized by a duly designated superior.

BOTH SIREN AND EMERGENCY LIGHTS MUST BE ON WHEN OPERATING IN THE EMERGENCY MODE, except in the case of a police response to a crime in progress where discontinuation of use of the siren in the area of the criminal activity is necessary to avoid alerting the criminal suspect(s).

Emergency Mode – Patient Transport (Ambulance only):

Emergency mode will only be utilized during patient transport to the hospital when the attendant-in-charge has determined that the patient’s condition is unstable or life-threatening. Since basic life support (BLS) patients will seldom meet this criteria, only an EMS supervisor can authorize the emergency transport of BLS level patients by a BLS crew.

Emergency transports will not be made simply to expedite returning the ambulance to service to be available for other calls. The EMS supervisor may authorize emergency transports during multi-casualty situations or when another life-threatening situation exists without sufficient medical resources to respond otherwise.

Non-Emergency/Routine Mode:

When the E911 Emergency Communications Division assigns a call and designates it as PRIORITY 3, 4 or 5 the personnel assigned will respond as soon as practicable, observing all traffic regulations and will not activate emergency lights and siren.

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Altering Response Modes:

An operator may downgrade or upgrade his response mode based on updated information received either from the dispatcher or on-scene personnel. If an operator elects to upgrade or downgrade his response mode, he shall notify the dispatcher by radio of that decision. Supervisors are encouraged to monitor incident radio traffic and direct changes in response modes.

Right-of-Way:

When two or more emergency apparatus arrive at the same location together, the apparatus having the right-of-way should proceed first. Operators should avoid passing other responding apparatus while en route to an incident.

Police vehicles must yield to all EMS and Fire equipment operating under emergency conditions.

EMS vehicles must yield to all Fire equipment operating under emergency conditions when responding to fire or hazardous materials incidents.

Vehicles with concealed emergency lights (interior and/or grill-mounted) must use extreme caution in assuming the right-of-way at intersections where the concealed mounting of the lights prevents clear vision or observation of those lights by intersecting vehicles.

Traffic Pre-emption Devices:

When the vehicle is so equipped, use of available traffic pre-emption devices is required when responding in the emergency mode. Traffic pre-emption devices may be used by ambulance operators during patient transports in the non-emergency mode at the discretion of the vehicle operator.

Traffic pre-emption devices may not be utilized outside of the response or transport phases of an incident. They are not to be used when returning to the station or during general transit through the City.

Cellular Phones:

The vehicle operator should never operate a portable phone while operating in an emergency mode. The only exception to this is for relevant emergency communications between the attendant-in-charge and a supervisor. Such contact shall be kept as brief as possible.

Emergency Escort of Civilian Vehicles:

The *City of Virginia Beach* does not authorize the emergency escort of private civilian vehicles. In medical emergencies, the patient should be transported in an ambulance.

If a civilian vehicle attempts to follow an ambulance during patient transport in the emergency mode, the operator shall request law enforcement assistance via the dispatcher. Until compliance has been achieved, the operator may at his discretion reduce to non-emergency driving for the safety of the ambulance crew, civilian driver and general public.

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