

Travis County Emergency Services District No. 9
Westlake Fire Department
Standard Operating Guideline

Subject: Driving Policy

Effective Date: June 15, 1997

Authorized By: Chief Paul Barker Revised Date: September 11, 2002

I. Purpose

To institute safe driving procedures for all TCESD # 9 vehicles and all privately-owned vehicles (POV's) responding to emergency calls as defined under the Texas Transportation Code.

II. Policies

1. All Department vehicles and POV's responding to alarms shall be operated in a safe manner at all times, including and especially during emergency response.
2. Members who have been given written permission by their Captain or his/her designee may respond to a call for the Department Code 3 in their POV's as an Authorized Emergency Vehicle of the Department.
3. It is the policy of the Department to respond appropriately to any emergency when called. It is also the policy of the Department that the need to immediately respond to any call must out-weigh any unreasonable danger to the member or the public.
4. The decision to respond by POV to a call rests with the individual member, and any such response shall be made with appropriate regard for the safety of others and without conscious indifference or reckless disregard for the safety of others.
5. All members responding in POV's that do not meet the safety and road-worthiness requirements of this Policy shall respond to all calls Code 1.
6. The ability to respond to a call Code 3 is a privilege, not a right, and a Member driving Code 3 is merely "requesting" the right of way and is not entitled to the right of way.
7. No Member may respond to a call Code 3 if they are more than four (4) miles from the Department's boundaries, or unless instructed to respond Code 3 by dispatch or an officer of the Department on scene and at that officer's discretion.

III. Background

Of all the potentially dangerous situations that firefighters must deal with, the driving of and riding on an apparatus can be one of the most dangerous. The NFPA lists "responding to and returning from alarms as the second leading cause of firefighter injury and death each year (heart disease is the leading cause).

IV. Definitions

1. An "Authorized Emergency Vehicle" shall mean a POV authorized by the Department to respond to emergency calls and as defined under the Texas Transportation Code.
2. "Code 1" shall mean responding to an Emergency Call without the use of both audible and visual signals as required herein.
3. "Code 3" shall mean responding to an Emergency call using both audible and visual signals as required herein.
4. "Emergency Call" and "Call" shall mean any alarm dispatched by the Department's dispatchers, or as stated within the nature of the call as dispatched.
5. "Privately Owned Vehicle" or "POV" shall mean all non-Departmental vehicles owned by individual members of the Department for their personal use.
6. "Member" shall mean a volunteer or paid member of the Department.

V. Procedure

A. *General Driving Conditions and Requirements*

1. All traffic laws and rules shall be adhered to while traveling under normal conditions.
2. Seat belts shall be worn at all times without exception. All members shall be seated and belted-in prior to and during any response.
3. Vehicle headlights shall be turned on at all times while operating Department vehicles and when responding Code 3 in POV's (recent studies have shown this practice drastically reduces accidents).
4. Defensive driving principles shall be adhered to at all times.
5. The remote overhead door opener shall be mounted in the apparatus cab, readily accessible to the driver. The driver shall be responsible for the safe operation of the overhead door.
6. When parking Department apparatus, the emergency (parking) brake shall always be set and wheel chocks deployed (wheel chocks are not required when parked in the truck room).
7. When parking POV's, automatic transmissions shall be placed in "Park", the parking brake shall be set, and the vehicle wheels shall be turned to the curb in accordance with the recommendations of the DPS.
8. Traffic cones shall be placed on the traffic-side corners of the vehicle when a Department apparatus is parked on a roadway whenever possible.
9. Vehicle's four-way flashers" shall be used when parked on a roadway.

B. *General Requirements for Driving Code 1*

All members responding to any call driving Code 1 shall:

1. Obey all applicable Motor Vehicle laws of the State of Texas.
2. Drive in a reasonable and prudent manner under the circumstances then existing.
3. Report all tickets, incidents, or accidents related to the Member's driving.

C. General Requirements for Driving Code 3

All Members when responding Code 3 to an Emergency call of the Department shall:

1. Activate all lights and sirens prior to responding and keep them on throughout the response, unless the response has been reduced to Code 1.
2. Use the left lane as much as possible during response (Texas Law mandates drivers to move to the right for emergency vehicles).
3. When approaching intersections controlled by a red light or stop sign that controls the Member's lanes of travel, the Member shall slow or stop as necessary and determine that the Member has control of all lanes of traffic before proceeding through the intersection.
4. When approaching intersections controlled by a green light or yield sign controlling the Member's lanes of travel, the Member shall slow or stop as necessary and determine that the Member has control of all lanes of traffic before proceeding through the intersection.
5. When approaching a school bus that has activated its flashing signals, the Member shall stop the emergency vehicle and wait until the driver of the bus deactivates his flashing signals or otherwise clearly signals that the Member may proceed. When passing a stopped school bus, the Member shall keep appropriate regard for the safety of others and for those whom are either embarking or disembarking the school bus, regardless of whether the bus has activated its flashing signals. Members shall also use appropriate regard for the safety of all persons when traveling through a posted school zone.
6. When conditions dictate that Member must drive in the oncoming lanes of traffic, the Member shall not proceed until he has control of the oncoming lanes of traffic. The Member shall keep appropriate regard for the safety of others in relation to any vehicles in all lanes of travel.
7. Maintain a reasonable distance from traffic in front of the Authorized Emergency Vehicle to allow for sudden movement and directional changes of other vehicles.
8. When multiple vehicles are responding together, the operators should follow in the same lane of traffic and maintain a safe distance behind the leading vehicle, unless the leading vehicle grants the following vehicle permission to pass. (remember that motorists may not expect additional vehicles to follow after the first one has passed them).
9. Prudent speed as necessary to account for road, traffic, and weather conditions.
10. Maintain two-way communications with the Department's Communications.
11. Report all tickets, incidents, or accidents related to the Member's driving.
12. Not pass any vehicle on the right, unless it is the most appropriate alternative available, and after exercising appropriate regard for the safety of others in the lanes of travel.
13. Not pass another unit or apparatus during response without requesting and receiving permission from that unit.
14. Not misuse or abuse the Code 3 Policy, its privileges, or responsibilities.
15. Sound any horns and alternate the siren's tones upon entering and exiting any intersection.
16. Use all turn or other signals as necessary, at the Member's discretion, to communicate to other persons the Member's intentions.
17. Shall notify Communications that the Member is responding to the call Code 3.

18. Reduce to Code 1 when traveling on a highway at speeds less than the posted speed limit, slower than the flow of traffic or when responding to a long distance mutual aid call when Code 3 driving will not effect the response time.

D. Member Requirements to Drive Code 3

Any member who is authorized by the Department as required herein shall meet the following requirements before being authorized to respond to any call Code 3:

1. Be at least 18 year of age and have the approval of his/her Shift Officer.
2. Maintain a Texas automobile liability insurance policy with a minimum of \$100,000.00 limits for personal injury/property damage and \$300,000.00 aggregate limits.
3. Provide a certified driving record from the Texas Department of Public Safety for the previous five (5) years.
4. To qualify for training, a member must not be on probation, deferred adjudication, deferred prosecution, or parole for any penal code offenses involving a Motor Vehicle in any jurisdiction of the United States of America, including, but not limited to, driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, intoxication assault, intoxication homicide, criminally negligent homicide, driving with a suspended license, or reckless driving. Any of the above offensives committed after clearance will require a review by the Chief Officers.
5. Must be a licensed driver with no medical restrictions from DPS.
6. Complete an emergency vehicle operations course as approved or provided by the Department.
7. Have a driving record that demonstrates a high regard for safe driving habits, which will be determined by the Department or its designees, taking into consideration moving violations and accidents as reflected by the Member's driving record obtained from the Texas Department of Public Safety.

E. Equipment Requirements for Members to Respond Code 3 in POV's

A POV responding as an Authorized Emergency Vehicle herein shall be in good working order, currently licensed, registered, and inspected in the State of Texas, and be equipped with the following when responding to any Department call Code 3:

1. A siren or audible signal of a type approved by the Department that emits a sound audible under normal conditions at a distance of 500 feet.
2. A signal lamp that is either temporarily or permanently attached to the vehicle's roof and flashes a red light visible at a distance of at least 500 feet in normal sunlight.
3. A two-way radio approved by the Department for the receipt and transmission of Departmental radio and emergency traffic.