

**Lower Providence Township Police Department
Eagleville, Pennsylvania**

General Order ☒
Special Order ☐
Personnel Order ☐

ORDER NUMBER

507

Subject

Vehicle Stops

Date of Issue

February 3, 2020

Effective Date

February 3, 2020

Expiration Date

**Until Amended or
Rescinded**

Issued by:

Michael Jackson, Chief of Police

Amends

Rescinds

All Previous Orders

Standard Number:

Distribution

- 1. General Order Manuals**
- 2. Records Manual**
- 3. Reading Verification to all Personnel**

I. PURPOSE

It is the purpose of this policy to establish guidelines for stopping and approaching motorists in a manner that promotes the safety of the officer and the motorists.

II. POLICY

Although stopping motorists on the highway for traffic violations or other purposes is often considered a routine function of patrol officers, it is one that has been demonstrated to be potentially dangerous for both officers and motorists even during apparently "routine" situations. Therefore, it is the policy of this department that motor vehicle stops shall be performed professionally and courteously, and with a view towards educating the public about proper driving procedures while consistently recognizing and taking the necessary steps to minimize the dangers involved in these activities for the officer, the motorist, and other users of the highway.

III. DEFINITIONS

A. High Risk Vehicle Stop

Any vehicle stop in which the officer knows or reasonably believes that the operator or other passengers in the vehicle are armed and dangerous.

B. Unknown Risk Vehicle Stop

Any vehicle stop in which the officer has little or no information about the driver's background, present mental state, propensity towards violence or other important matters.

IV. REGULATION

A. Stopping and Approaching Traffic Violators (Unknown Risk Vehicle Stop)

The following procedures are to be followed whenever possible. It is recognized that varying conditions such as roadway construction, volume of traffic, and the urgency of making vehicle stops may require officers to adjust these procedures to particular conditions.

1. Officers shall perform vehicle stops only when they have articulable reason to do so.
2. Once an initial decision has been made to stop a motorist, the officer shall select an area that provides reasonable safety, avoiding curves, hills, heavily trafficked and poorly lit areas and roads without shoulders. Whenever possible, the officer shall also avoid the use of private drives, business locations and areas where a large volume of spectators are likely to gather.
3. When a location has been selected for the stop, units will advise the Dispatch Center prior to stopping a vehicle giving the location, tag number, state of registration, year, make, color of vehicle, and the number of occupants in the vehicle. Dispatch Center personnel should automatically run the vehicle license check through NCIC/CLEAN. At the officer's discretion or dispatcher's request, additional information may be exchanged.
 - a. Additionally, the officer will notify the on-duty supervisor or OIC if the stop is outside of the Township.
4. At the desired location, the officer should signal the operator to stop at the far right side of the roadway or at the safest shoulder by activating the overhead emergency lights and siren as necessary.
 - a. On multi-lane roads, the officer may facilitate movement to the right shoulder by gradually changing lanes behind the violator until the right side of the roadway is reached.
 - b. Should the violator stop abruptly in the wrong lane or location, the officer should instruct him to move by using the appropriate hand signals or by activating the vehicle's public address system.
5. Once properly stopped, the officer should position the police vehicle about one half to one car length behind the violator's vehicle and at a slight angle, with the front approximately two feet to the traffic side of the violator's vehicle and the front tires cut to the right.
 - a. At night, the spotlight should not be used to direct the violator but may be used to illuminate the vehicle's interior once stopped. The patrol vehicle should use its low beams if high beams would blind oncoming traffic.
6. When exiting the patrol vehicle, the officer should be particularly alert to suspicious movements or actions of the vehicle operator or passengers.
 - a. The officer should keep his strong hand empty and at night hold a flashlight in the support hand.
7. Approaching from the driver's side, the officer should be observant of the passenger compartment and stop at a point to the rear of the trailing edge of the left front door in order to communicate with the driver.
 - a. Where circumstances dictate, particularly where traffic is close enough to create a potential problem, the officer may choose to approach the violator's vehicle from the right hand side and stop at the trailing edge of the right front door.
 - b. When approaching from either side of the vehicle, the trunk or hatch should be checked for closure.
 - c. When the violator's vehicle has occupants in the rear seat, the officer should approach to a point near the leading edge of the left front door, being particularly observant of occupant movements and choosing a path that will not allow the occupants to thrust the door open against the officer.
 - d. The officer should watch the hands of the operator and passengers at all times.
 - e. When approaching panel trucks and vans, the officer may decide to use a more cautious approach. He/she may request the driver to exit the vehicle and instruct the driver to open the rear and side doors to ensure that there are no other persons inside.
 - f. When approaching vehicles with tinted windows, the officer may request the driver to roll down one or more windows for a clear view inside the vehicle. At night have the driver turn on his interior dome light and the officer should turn his patrol vehicle's headlights off. This largely negates the effect of tinted windows.
 - g. In two-officer police vehicles, the passenger officer shall be responsible for radio communications, note taking and relaying messages to the communications center. He will also act as an observer and cover for his fellow officer.

B. Issuing Citations (Unknown Risk Vehicle Stop)

1. When issuing citations, conducting roadside sobriety tests or conversing with the violator, the officer and other parties shall be positioned to the side of the road, clear of the motor vehicles. At no time shall the officer or others stand in front of, between, or behind the stopped vehicles.
 - a. The officer should try to retrieve the license and registration with the support hand. The officer should never reach into the vehicle.
 - b. When returning to the police vehicle, never turn your back to the suspect. Take a few steps backwards and then turn slightly, watching the vehicle over your shoulder.
 2. During the stop, the violator should remain in his motor vehicle while the officer writes the citation or conducts other business. Violators shall not be permitted to sit in patrol vehicles while citations are being prepared or other police business is being conducted.
 - a. The officer should check wants and warrants for the operator.
 3. When preparing citations, the officer should position paperwork and related materials in a manner that allows him/her to maintain vantage over actions of the violator and other occupants.
 4. When the officer returns to the suspect's vehicle to issue a citation, he/she should approach the vehicle using the same procedures implied in the initial approach. Do not let your guard down.
 - a. The officer should quickly, but accurately, explain the citation to the operator and explain the procedure for responding to District Court.
 - b. The officer should return to the patrol vehicle in the same manner as in the initial return, again, without letting down his/her guard.
 - c. The officer should wait for the operator to merge into traffic.
- C. Stopping an Approaching Motorist (Unknown Risk Vehicle Stop)
- In cases where a motorist must be stopped from oncoming traffic, the following actions may be taken:
1. Drive the police vehicle to the extreme right portion of the roadway and, as the violator approaches, signal him to stop by using hand signals and emergency lights.
 2. Because of the potential hazard involved, an officer shall not leave his/her vehicle when attempting to stop oncoming motorists.
 3. If the subject motorist complies with the instructions, the police vehicle may then be turned around and appropriately positioned to the rear of the violator's vehicle.
 4. Should the motorist fail to comply with the officer's instructions, the officer should turn the vehicle around and follow, stop and approach the violators in the prescribed manner.
- D. Stopping a Following Violator (Unknown Risk Vehicle Stop)
- When stopping a motorist to the rear of the police vehicle, the following procedures may be followed:
1. The officer should drive to the right shoulder of the road, and as the violator approaches, signal him to stop.
 2. The officer should not exit his/her vehicle in order to signal the subject motorist.
 3. Should the motorist fail to comply, the officer should return to the roadway and stop and approach him in the prescribed manner.
- E. Responsibilities of Back-up Officers
1. Two Officer Unit
 - a. If the traffic stop is made by a two-officer unit, the passenger officer is responsible for all radio communications, writing all notes and messages, and recording all specifics about the stop. During the approach phase of a traffic stop, the second officer will leave the patrol vehicle and assume a position of cover for the approaching officer. The cover officer is situated on the opposite side of the vehicle from the initiating officer.
 2. Back-up Second Unit
 - a. If a second police unit responds to assist in the traffic stop, extreme caution must be exhibited when positioning the vehicle as it approaches. The second unit should be placed to provide additional protection to the stopping officer and the violator and to warn the motorists. The second officer should approach the violator's vehicle only to a position where cover can be provided to the stopping officer.
- F. Making High-Risk Vehicle Stop
- The following procedures may be employed when an officer initiating a vehicle stop has reason to believe that the occupants may be armed and dangerous.

1. When planning to stop the suspect vehicle, the officer shall notify the communications center; describe the nature or reason for the stop; provide information on the vehicle, tag number and number of occupants; and request appropriate assistance to make the stop.
 - a. Additionally, the officer will notify the on-duty sergeant if the car stop is outside the township.
2. An officer should not individually initiate high-risk vehicle stops if back-up units will not be available in an appropriate amount of time unless the urgency of the situation demands immediate action.
3. After selecting an appropriate location and with adequate support units in position, the officer should signal the suspect to stop.
 - a. Varying conditions regarding the engineering of a particular traffic artery, the urgency to stop, the existing volume of traffic, lighting conditions, location of bystanders, intersections, curves, hills, private drive, and businesses should be taken into consideration prior to the stop.
 - b. The officer initiating the stop will utilize all emergency warning devices.
4. Officers should position their vehicles approximately 30 feet behind the suspect vehicle, in positions that will maximize opportunities for cover and in a manner that will illuminate the interior of the vehicle to the occupants' disadvantage.
5. The officer initiating the stop, or the officer with the best observation point, should issue verbal commands to vehicle occupants through the vehicle's public address system, if available; Only one officer shall issue commands.
6. Once the suspect vehicle has stopped, officers should exit their vehicles quickly and assume positions of cover.
7. The officer in charge shall first identify himself and then notify the occupants that they are considered to be armed and dangerous, that all occupants of the vehicle are under arrest, that all occupants must place their hands on the ceiling of the vehicle and that all instructions are to be followed without hesitation or suspicious movements.
8. The operator of the suspect vehicle should be ordered in separate commands to do the following: lower his window, remove the ignition keys with his left hand, drop them on the ground, open the door from the outside, step out of the vehicle, turn completely around, face away from the officers, walk backward until commanded to stop and lie face down on the ground with hands stretched far to the sides. Subsequent occupants should be similarly commanded until all are positioned to be handcuffed and searched.
 - a. Each suspect should be handcuffed, searched and secured in a police vehicle before another suspect is commanded to exit the suspect vehicle.
9. With appropriate cover, officers should then approach the suspect vehicle to inspect the passenger compartment and trunk.
 - a. When available, a K-9 Unit should be used to inspect the passenger compartment and trunk.
10. Duties of officers on the scene of a High-Risk vehicle stop
 - a. Officer #1 (first officer on the scene) will initiate the vehicle stop and give the commands to the occupants of the suspect vehicle. He/she will have his/her duty weapon out and at the ready with his/her finger out of the trigger guard.
 - b. Officer #2 (second officer on the scene) is responsible for covering the suspects inside the vehicle with a weapon at the ready and finger out of the trigger guard. When each suspect is commanded back to the area between car #1 and car #2, (just in front of cars #1 and #2 open doors) officer #2 will cover the suspect with a weapon the entire time until he/she is handcuffed and searched by officer #3.
 - c. Officer #3 (third officer on the scene) is responsible for covering the suspects inside the suspect vehicle with a weapon at the ready and finger out of the trigger guard. When each suspect is commanded back to the area between car #1 and car #2, (just in front of cars #1 and #2 open doors) officer #3 will assume command of the suspect and will handcuff and search each suspect and secure the person in a police vehicle.
 - d. Officer #4 (fourth officer on the scene) is responsible for covering the suspects inside the suspect vehicle with a weapon at the ready and finger out of the trigger guard.
 - e. Additional officers at the scene should assist with performing a more in-depth search of suspects before securing them inside a police vehicle, assist in covering suspects inside the suspect vehicle, assist with traffic control and provide rear security for the High Risk Stop. The Sergeant or OIC on the scene should direct his/her personnel accordingly.

G. Stopping Oversize and Overweight Vehicle (Unknown Risk Vehicle Stop)

In the event an officer needs to stop commercial and similar oversized or overweight vehicles, the following procedures should be followed.

1. Select a location for the stop that provides enough room for the vehicle and sufficient stability to support the vehicle's weight, and allow the operator sufficient time and distance to make the stop.
2. Approach the cab from the rear, using the driver's outside mirror to observe the driver and activity in the cab.
3. Never climb onto the vehicle to make contact with the operator. Maintain a position to the rear of the driver's door and ask him to exit the vehicle, if and when necessary.

H. Officer Safety Rules

1. General Safety Rules

- a. Always watch the subject's hands.
- b. If the operator moves his/her hands towards the glove box, purse, briefcase, etc., to get an operator's license, be extra cautious.
- c. Don't view any stop as "routine."
- d. During the stop, use electric locks to unlock your doors; you may need to enter the passenger side of the patrol car to use the radio.
- e. If problems occur or you feel uneasy, don't approach until back-up arrives.
- f. Always maintain a defensive position and attitude.
- g. If the operator or passengers get out of the vehicle and approach your vehicle, order them back into their vehicle. If they refuse, back your vehicle to obtain a safe distance between you and the suspects.

2. Precautions During Night Stops

- a. The officer's alertness should be increased due to decreased visibility.
- b. Added caution should be employed when selecting the location of the stop.
- c. Illumination of the interior of the violator's vehicle should be accomplished by spotlights and "take-down" lights.
- d. Exit with your flashlight in your support hand.
- e. Sweep the vehicle with the flashlight beam to disrupt the suspect's night vision.

Michael Jackson

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Chief of Police