



Las Cruces Police Department
GENERAL ORDERS
FIELD OPERATIONS VOLUME 2
GO-274 TRAFFIC CRASH INVESTIGATIONS
Revised 5/26/2015

274 TRAFFIC CRASH INVESTIGATIONS

PURPOSE

The purpose of this General Order is to establish guidelines for the investigation of traffic crashes. Use of consistent methodology in investigating traffic crashes is essential to ensure that proper action is taken for each kind of crash.

POLICY

It is the policy of the Las Cruces Police Department (LCPD) to investigate traffic crashes within the city limits and take traffic enforcement action when warranted.

APPLICABILITY

This General Order applies to all commissioned officers. This General Order supersedes all previous versions.

REFERENCES

- ADM.26.09, OPR.07.01 – OPR.07.16
- NM Traffic Law Manual
- Municipal Traffic Ordinance Manual
- [NM Uniform Crash Report Instruction Manual](#)
- General Order 208 Vehicle Pursuits
- General Order 270 Towing and Impounding Vehicles
- [FAA Fact Sheet for Aircraft Crashes](#)

DEFINITIONS

Great Bodily Injury (GBI) – An injury to a person which creates a high probability of death; or which causes serious disfigurement; or which results in permanent or protracted loss or impairment of the function of any member or organ of the body.

274.01 INITIAL RESPONSE

- A. Upon arrival at a crash scene responding officer(s) shall take all necessary actions to prevent the crash from becoming worse. This includes determining the need for additional resources, caring for injured persons, protecting property, and controlling traffic.



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- B. Officers should attempt to get the vehicles removed from the roadway as expeditiously as possible when the crash causes a disruption to the traffic flow or creates a traffic hazard. Vehicle positions shall be marked by the officer prior to removing the vehicles from the roadway. The exception to this would be serious injury or fatality crashes or where there is possible city liability.
- C. If the Fire Department and EMS are called to assist at a crash scene, the investigating officer shall be in charge of the crash investigation but should remember that the Fire Department and EMS are responsible for medical care and fire related issues.
- D. Officers shall follow appropriate procedures for each classification of crash as described in this General Order. Crash classifications are:
 - 1. Fatality
 - 2. Incapacitating injury
 - 3. Non-incapacitating injury
 - 4. Non-injury
 - 5. Property damage only
 - 6. Hit and run

274.02 FIELD INVESTIGATIONS

- A. The first responding officer shall investigate the crash unless relieved by another officer/investigator. The investigating officer shall:
 - 1. Locate and identify all drivers involved in a crash and all vehicle passengers. Officers shall obtain driver's licenses, registrations, and proof of insurance from the drivers involved.
 - 2. If there is an altercation and/or disturbance between involved persons in the crash, the officer shall request back-up, if needed, to resolve the altercation and/or disturbance. Additional charges may be filed for any altercation and/or disturbance encountered.



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3. Locate and identify the property owner of any damaged property and obtain the property owner's name, address, and telephone number. If City property has been damaged in the crash, dispatch shall be notified of the type of city property damaged and its location.
4. Locate all witnesses, if possible, and obtain names, addresses, and telephone numbers from each witness. Obtain an initial statement from witnesses of what occurred and make all attempts to have witnesses available for the crash investigation.
5. Observe driver's physical condition. If a driver appears to be impaired to any degree, the appropriate investigation for suspected impairment shall be followed to include the administration of Standardized Field Sobriety Tests (SFSTs).
6. Note all physical conditions at the crash scene. Take accurate measurements and obtain all necessary diagram information.
7. Obtain all physical evidence to clarify the chain of events that may have contributed to the crash.
8. Check the scene and area for hazards and defects in the road, lighting, signs, signals, etc. The investigating officer has the responsibility to see that debris from the crash is cleared from the roadway.
9. Notify dispatch of any hazardous condition existing which requires immediate attention or repair.
10. Inspect vehicles involved in the crash for defects, mechanical or otherwise, which may have contributed to the crash. If a defect is found that would make the vehicle unsafe to drive, it shall be towed from the scene.
11. In cases involving an unattended vehicle or property, notify the owner of the vehicle or property in person, by telephone or in writing. Notification shall include the date, time, location, and the crash report number.
12. If crash victims are unable to take custody of their personal property at the scene, the investigating officer is responsible for assuring that the items are properly protected. If no authorized person can assume custody of such items, the investigating officer shall follow the same procedures as for personal items found in impounded vehicles; i.e., make an inventory and enter the items as personal property on a Report of Towed Vehicle form. If personal items found are of a high



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dollar value, the officer will take these items into custody and enter them into evidence for safekeeping. This action shall be noted on the crash report or the offense incident report as appropriate.

13. Complete tow sheets for all vehicles involved in the crash that are towed from the scene of the crash to include owner requested towing. See General Order 270 Towing and Impounding Vehicles.

B. Crashes resulting from a police vehicle pursuit shall be investigated per the protocol outlined in General Order 208.17 Pursuit Related Crashes.

274.03 HIT AND RUN CRASH INVESTIGATIONS

A. When investigating a hit and run crash, officers shall:

1. Complete all applicable steps in section 274.02 of this General Order.
2. Obtain and broadcast a description of the hit and run suspect vehicle, driver, occupants, and damage if practical to do so.
3. Interview witnesses with an emphasis on identifying the hit and run vehicle and driver.
4. Thoroughly check the scene for any physical evidence. Make note in the report of all evidence found and submitted to the Evidence Unit.
5. Canvas the area for additional witnesses and information if practical.

B. Officers shall make all reasonable efforts to investigate and follow-up on hit and run crash investigations prior to going off-duty in an effort to locate and take enforcement action on the hit and run suspect. All information discovered shall be included on the crash report. Follow-up hit and run investigations may be assigned to the hit and run investigator assigned to the Traffic Section. Investigative follow-up should include:

1. If a suspect address is developed, attempt to make contact at that address and document any information gathered.
2. If contact is made with the hit and run vehicle and/or driver, officers will make every attempt to collect, photograph and complete the crash investigation as necessary at the time.



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3. Attempt to contact neighbors of the suspect and document any information obtained.
 4. If the hit and run vehicle is impounded, ensure that the report is completed and properly submitted prior to going off-duty. The Records Unit will ensure that a copy of the crash report is provided to the Traffic Section for investigation in a timely manner.
 5. Run registration, if known, on all hit and run suspect vehicles. Attempt to contact the owner of the vehicle by driving to the registered owner's address (if outside the city limits supervisory approval must be obtained). Document efforts to contact the suspect and vehicle in the crash report and submit the report prior to going off-duty.
- C. When two or more people are involved in a crash resulting in injury or death of any person, or property damage to an apparent extent of \$500.00 of damage or more, and mutually agree to exchange information and leave the scene, both parties have violated section 27-12-4-6, Immediate Notice of Accident. If one of the parties involved later contacts the police department to request a report, that person should be advised that he/she will have to contact the other involved driver(s) and they should appear together with the vehicles involved. A crash involving a death shall be investigated immediately and the reporting party detained until the report can be verified and a statement can be taken.
1. Once involved parties for previously unreported crashes involving minor injuries and property damage, the reporting officer shall complete a uniform crash report based on the statements of both drivers and any physical evidence found on the vehicles. Drivers shall be required to provide a valid drivers license, proof of insurance covering the date of the crash, and vehicle registration. Issuance of citations for contributing factor violations will be at the officer's discretion. Citations for violation of section 27-12-4-6 shall be issued to both drivers.
 2. In the case of a crash when one driver immediately reports the crash to the department and advises that the other person refused to stay at the scene (whether or not the second driver provides his or her name to the first driver) a report shall be prepared. The reporting officer shall contact the other driver to complete the initial crash report and shall issue all appropriate citations including 27-12-4-6, Immediate Notice of Accident, to the driver that left the scene.
- D. Information blocks on hit and run crash reports shall be left blank for data not known at the time the report was taken. For example, if license plate information is not known, the corresponding information block will be left blank. Information not known at the



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time of the initial report will be inserted into the appropriate block by the follow-up investigator when the case is cleared. All reasonable efforts shall be made by the initial reporting officer to clear any hit and run crashes before the end of the current duty day.

274.04 GREAT BODILY INJURY OR FATALITY CRASHES

A. When investigating a great bodily injury (GBI) or fatality crash , first responding officers shall:

1. Complete all applicable steps in section 274.02 of this General Order with an emphasis on preservation of physical evidence. A supervisor shall be notified as soon as practical in order to determine if the investigation shall be turned over to a Traffic Investigator.
2. Due to the seriousness of the crash, clearing the roadway is not a priority and a long-term detour of traffic should be implemented.
3. First responding officers should generally avoid administering SFSTs or making an arrest prior to the arrival of the Traffic Investigator. A Traffic Section supervisor should be consulted before any arrests pertaining to the crash are made.

B. Traffic Investigators may be called out after hours. An on-call list is maintained by the Traffic Section Investigators. A Traffic Section supervisor shall also be on-call and shall be notified of all crashes requiring a Traffic Investigator. Once called to the scene of a GBI or fatality crash, the Traffic Investigator shall:

1. Be responsible for conducting the traffic crash investigation and determine what additional investigative resources are needed. Photographs and physical evidence collection shall occur after photographs are taken of the scene. In cases where injured people or evidence must be moved prior to the arrival of the Traffic Investigator, the person and/or evidence should be marked.
2. Conduct any sobriety testing on involved drivers. The Traffic Investigator may delegate this task to another officer as appropriate.
3. Take statements of drivers, passengers, witnesses, or anyone else who may have pertinent information regarding any contributing factors to the crash. He/she is also responsible for marking the scene and taking measurements for diagramming. These tasks may be delegated to another officer.



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4. Request a representative of the Office of the Medical Investigator, if needed, to estimate the time of death, time of declaration of death, and time of removal of the body. State statute dictates that the body of the deceased shall not be moved or searched until a medical investigator has arrived on scene.
 5. Determine when involved vehicles may be towed from the scene and where involved vehicles will be stored in order to preserve evidence.
- C. GBI or fatality crashes resulting from a police vehicle pursuit shall be investigated per the protocol outlined in General Order 208.17 Pursuit Related Crashes.

274.05 ASSAULT BY MOTOR VEHICLE

Assault with a motor vehicle is a criminal offense and is not considered motor vehicle crash. The Criminal Investigations Section (CIS) shall be called to investigate these incidents. CIS may request a Traffic Investigator to assist with the investigation.

274.06 AIRCRAFT CRASHES

- A. An aircraft crash is any crash caused by the motion of an aircraft while taking off, landing or flying, resulting in death or injury to any person in the aircraft or on the ground, or damage to other vehicles or property the aircraft has struck. This also includes any damage to the aircraft occurring during an emergency landing. The first officer on scene shall evaluate the situation and report to dispatch any pertinent information. Victims will not be removed unless their safety is seriously threatened by their position or by the presence or possibility of fire.
- B. When notified of an aircraft crash, the on-duty supervisor shall coordinate and command the department's response to the scene, and shall ensure that the New Mexico State Police, City Manager, Airport Manager, Chief of Police, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and the National Traffic Safety Board (NTSB), if applicable, have been notified. The supervisor shall report the following details:
 1. Location and time of crash
 2. The number of people injured and/or casualties
 3. Identification of the aircraft involved
 4. Whether or not United States Mail was on board, if known
 5. Identify other property damaged



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- C. The department shall secure the scene of the crash until the New Mexico State Police arrive and, if requested, during the NTSB investigation of the incident.
- D. If the aircraft is a military aircraft, personnel will exercise special caution. The following hazards may exist with military aircraft:
 - 1. Cargo may include nuclear weapons
 - 2. Ejection seats may be triggered, causing explosions
 - 3. Rockets, bombs or other explosives may be accidentally detonated
- E. Once the New Mexico State Police have arrived on scene, the supervisor will brief the State Police Officer as to all information known and available and will then relinquish command to that officer. The supervisor will inquire as to what assistance the New Mexico State Police need and then provide as much assistance as capable.
- F. Spectators and members of the media are permitted to take photographs but will be confined to controlled distances away from the crash site. If the crash site involves military aircraft, military authorities may exercise any necessary censorship or limitation regarding photographs. Military crash sites will be controlled at a large enough distance to prevent identification of aircraft and its cargo until further direction is provided by military authorities.

274.07 COMPLETION OF REPORTS

Crash reports shall be entered into the system prior to going off-duty unless an extension has been granted by the officer's supervisor.

274.08 SUPERVISOR REVIEW

Supervisors shall review all traffic crash reports submitted to ensure that reports are properly completed.

274.09 CRASH REPORTS - STATE FORM

- A. The department submits crash reports electronically using the New Mexico Uniform Crash Report guidelines. The case number generated by the department shall be placed on the crash report per current procedures.



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- B. Witness statements can be paraphrased by the investigating officer and should be included in the crash report. Additionally, the witnesses' exact location prior to the crash should be noted on the report.
- C. All street names will be noted in the report, including avenue, street, drive, lane, etc. Crashes that are not related to an intersection (e.g., driveways, parked cars, fixed objects) will be classified according to the physical address where the collision occurred.

274.10 REPORTING

- A. A crash report shall be prepared every time an officer responds to a crash involving injury to any person or property damage of any type to a vehicle or property involved in the crash with the following exceptions:
 - 1. The crash involves property damage to an apparent extent of less than \$500.
 - 2. The crash occurred on private property, is not a hit and run, and does not involve injury or an arrestable offense such as DWI or Reckless Driving.
- B. The officer should advise the dispatcher to log that no report was made because of the above reasons. If at a later time, one of the parties involved claims that there was injury or significant damage as a result of such a crash, that person may be referred over to MVRDA for a copy of the dispatch notes and should also contact his or her insurance company.

274.11 PRIVATE PROPERTY CRASHES

Whenever a crash occurs on private property, a crash report will not be made unless it involves a hit and run, injury or death, or an arrestable offense such as DWI or Reckless Driving. When responding to a private property crash the officer should issue a private property crash card to the parties involved. Both parties should be advised to exchange identification, vehicle information, and insurance information as required in section 27-12-4-3, Duty to Give Information and Render Aid. Drivers should also be advised to contact their insurance companies with the exchanged information. Officer should still issue traffic citations for No Drivers License, No Insurance and No Registration if applicable.