

# LAKWOOD FIRE DEPARTMENT STANDARD OPERATING GUIDELINES

SOG NUMBER: 301.21	OPERATING PROCEDURES
DATE IMPLEMENTED: JANUARY 9, 2023 DATE REVISED:	TITLE: VEHICLE RESPONSE AND OPERATION

## **PURPOSE:**

This guideline was promulgated to assure the safe and efficient operation of all Fire Department vehicles while engaged in routine and emergency driving.

## **SCOPE:**

This procedure shall apply to all uniformed Lakewood Fire Department members (career and volunteer) that operate emergency vehicles, to include fire apparatus, rescue vehicles, command and support units, privately owned vehicles and any other vehicles operated by fire department members in the performance of their duties.

## **BACKGROUND:**

Responding to emergency incidents does not in any manner reduce the responsibility to operate vehicles safely. While prompt response to emergency incidents is an organizational priority, safety is always a higher priority. The responding units must arrive safely at the location where they are needed before they can deliver the required services. Unsafe operation of an emergency vehicle creates an unacceptable risk to firefighters and members, to the public and to the individuals who need assistance.

## **REQUISITE SKILLS:**

To discharge the duties properly and effectively, the driver operator must possess the following capabilities:

1. **Driving knowledge:** The driver operator must be aware of the driving characteristics, capabilities, and limitations of the vehicle(s); the proper operating techniques; and safe driving methods.
2. **Technical knowledge:** The driver operator must know how to properly operate the specialized equipment on the vehicle. A large measure of the effectiveness of the fire, and rescue, team depends on the technical skill and knowledge of the driver operator.
3. **Knowledge of territory:** To assist in arriving at the scene of emergencies as expeditiously as possible, the driver operator must be knowledgeable of the roads, highways, lanes, streets, and alleys in the response area.

4. **Physical fitness:** The driver operator must be capable of handling various vehicles and must possess the strength and dexterity necessary to properly control the vehicle. Emergency vehicle operation requires special skills and capabilities, including the ability to perceive hazards before they become dangerous; good hearing to determine the presence of other responding vehicles and to judge by ear the performance of the vehicle; and control and coordination of hands, arms, legs, and feet.
5. **Mental fitness:** Driver operators must be able to comprehend written and verbal instructions, to think clearly, to recognize problems or conflicts and take appropriate corrective action, and to exhibit proper driving attitudes. Overconfidence, recklessness, lack of attention, impatience, disregarding rules, discourtesy, and personal feelings are detriments to a driver's performance.

## **RESPONSIBILITY:**

1. The driver of any fire department vehicle always bears full responsibility for the safe operation of the vehicle, including compliance with all traffic laws, as well as, department policies, guidelines procedures, rules, and regulations.
2. The driver shall ensure the vehicle is safe for driving; all equipment is secure, and all compartment and passenger doors are closed; all passengers are seated with their seatbelts secured.
3. The officer-in-charge of a vehicle is responsible for supervising the driver and all other assigned members; this includes ensuring the driver complies with traffic laws, fire department policies, guidelines, procedures, rules, and regulations.
4. All fire department members are required to comply with all safety policies, guidelines, and procedures while operating, riding in, or performing any function which involves a fire department vehicle.
5. Authority to deviate from this procedure rests solely with the company officer who will be fully responsible for any deviation from this policy. The driver remains fully responsible for the safe operation of the vehicle.
6. State, and local laws exempt authorized emergency vehicles from regular traffic laws when responding to an emergency. However, neither state, and local laws nor this procedure absolve the driver of an emergency vehicle from the responsibility of driving with due regard for the safety of others on the road. The driver remains fully accountable for their actions.
7. While responding to the station or directly to an incident scene in a personally owned vehicle (POV). All laws, and rules of the State of New Jersey and/or the Township or any municipalities through which a member travels shall be adhered to. The Fire District and/or its Fire Department will assume no responsibility for driving negligence or recklessness on the part of a member responding to the station or directly to an incident and will provide no monetary or legal assistance should such negligence result in a citation and/or accident. Any member who is cited for a traffic violation under these circumstances should be suspended from any or all activities. The chief or his/her designate should determine the duration of the suspension.

## **TRAINING/CERTIFICATION:**

### 1. Driver Training Program:

Emergency vehicles shall only be operated by individuals who comply with the applicable state driver's license requirements and have been trained and certified to operate the particular vehicle, or type/class of vehicle set forth in the Fire Departments driver training policy.

### 2. Driving Record Review:

The Fire District shall obtain and review a copy of the member's motor vehicle record from the New Jersey Department of Motor Vehicles for individuals who are assigned a driving position or must drive as a condition of employment. Each authorized driver's Motor Vehicle Record shall be reviewed periodically (at intervals not to exceed three years, with annual review as an option)

## **SEAT BELTS:**

1. All persons driving or riding in fire department vehicles shall be seated in approved riding positions with seatbelts or safety restraints always fastened when the vehicle is in motion.
2. The driver of any department vehicle shall not move the vehicle until all passengers have boarded the vehicle and are seated with seat belts fastened. All passengers shall remain seated and secured if the vehicle is in motion. Seatbelts shall not be loosened or released while in-route to dress or don equipment.
3. Members shall not attempt to mount or dismount a moving vehicle under any circumstances.
4. Under no circumstances shall members be allowed to ride on the outside of a moving apparatus, including the tail board, roof, aerial platform/bucket, or a top-mounted pump panel.

## **WARNING DEVICES:**

Warning lights shall always be used when fire department vehicles are operating in an emergency response mode. Audible warning devices (siren and/or horn) shall be used as reasonably necessary to warn other drivers and pedestrians of the approach of an emergency vehicle and request right of way.

## **APPARATUS RESPONSE CATEGORIES:**

1. Non-Emergency: Response category for non-emergency incidents, without any emergency warning devices and adhering to all laws and statutes governing motor vehicle operation.
2. Emergency Response: Response category for emergency incidents using appropriate emergency warning devices and adhering to all laws and statutes governing emergency vehicle response. This response category is the default response category for all emergency responses.

### 3. Incident Commander Responsibility:

- a) In the event more than one piece of apparatus is dispatched to any incident it shall be the responsibility of the officer-in-charge of the first arriving unit to determine the response priority of all other incoming apparatus as soon as possible. Should this not be practical, or should the response priority not change, the officer-in-charge of the other responding vehicles shall make the determination as to the appropriate response category based upon radio transmissions or other factors.
- b) At the discretion of the incident commander different response priorities may be assigned to different incoming units. For example, if the incident commander identifies the need to have the roof checked as soon as possible a ladder/tower truck may be directed to respond in Emergency Response mode while the other units continue in Non-Emergency response mode.

### **SPEED:**

1. At all times the driver must proceed with due regard to the safety of others and in accordance with state and local laws.
2. The driver shall never exceed a speed that is safe and prudent, based on road and weather conditions and other circumstances, including the design and capabilities of the vehicle. The posted speed limit may be exceeded only when the required warning devices are in use and when weather, traffic and road conditions are favorable. The posted speed limit shall not be exceeded under any other conditions.
3. The posted advisory speed for a curve or active school zone shall be considered the maximum safe speed under all conditions, regardless of response conditions.

### **INTERSECTIONS:**

Intersections pose significant risk for vehicles responding to emergencies; therefore, the following special precautions shall be followed:

1. Fire department vehicles shall come to a full stop before entering a negative right of-way intersection (red light, flashing red light or stop sign), blind intersection, or any intersection where hazards are present and/or the driver cannot account for all oncoming traffic lanes.
2. If necessary, due to traffic conditions or visual obstructions, the emergency vehicle driver shall cross the intersection in stages, treating each lane as a separate intersection. The driver shall stop the vehicle, as necessary to ensure each lane may be crossed safely.
3. When passing through an intersection where the emergency vehicle has the right-of-way, by virtue of a green light in the direction of travel or a stop signal for cross traffic, the emergency vehicle speed shall be reduced such that the vehicle can proceed with due regard for safety.
4. If another responding emergency vehicle is met at an intersection, the vehicle with the right-of-way normally shall be given the right-of-way.

### **OPPOSING TRAFFIC LANES:**

1. Operating emergency vehicles in opposing traffic lanes is extremely hazardous under all conditions and should only be considered under exceptional circumstances (i.e., if there is no other route). Travel against the normal direction of traffic flow on a one-way street shall be limited to short distances. Emergency vehicle drivers must proceed slowly and with extreme caution in these situations.
2. When approaching a controlled intersection (traffic lights or stop signs) in an opposing traffic lane or center turn lane, the emergency vehicle shall come to a full stop before entering the intersection, even if the traffic lane is green in the direction of travel.
3. Designated median strip crossovers marked "Authorized Vehicles Only" shall only be used during response when apparatus can complete the turn without obstructing the flow of traffic in either travel direction, or when all traffic movement has stopped. These crossovers shall not be used in nonemergent situations.

### **PASSING:**

1. When overtaking traffic that is moving in the same direction, the emergency vehicle driver shall give the other driver an opportunity to yield the right-of way before passing. If it is necessary to pass a vehicle that has not yielded the right of way, the emergency vehicle shall provide as wide a clearance as possible.
2. Passing other emergency vehicles while responding to an emergency is prohibited; unless the vehicle being overtaken pulls off to the far-right side of the roadway, stops, and physically waves the overtaking vehicle past or clearly makes a unit-to-unit radio transmission indicating the same.
3. Emergency vehicles shall not pass a school bus that has stopped with red flashing lights to load or discharge passengers. The emergency vehicle shall stop, and then proceed slowly and with extreme caution past the school bus after the red flashing lights on the bus are turned off and all members must be vigilant for children while approaching and passing the bus. The emergency vehicle driver must be prepared to stop immediately while approaching, passing, and leaving the area in which the school bus is stopped.

### **PEDESTRIAN CROSSWALK:**

If the crosswalk is occupied, the emergency vehicle shall slow down and be prepared to stop if the pedestrian does not yield the right-of-way.

### **OFF-ROAD SURFACE:**

Except for the Brush Truck, or other vehicles designed to do so. Fire Apparatus shall never leave a paved road surface and should only be considered under exceptional circumstances (i.e., if there is no other route, or is necessary for immediate life safety).

## **RETURN TO ROADWAY:**

Vehicle operators shall be aware of the actions to be taken if the wheels of the vehicle leave the paved surface of the roadway. In these situations, the vehicle shall be slowed, typically to a speed below 20 mph, before any attempt is made to return it to the roadway. Depending on the road conditions and the condition of the off-road surface on which the vehicle is moving, it may be necessary to carefully bring the vehicle to a complete stop before attempting a return to the roadway; under many circumstances, particularly involving heavy apparatus, this may be the safest course of action.

## **ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE:**

1. Fire Department personnel are not permitted to be on duty, to respond to emergency incidents, to drive or operate fire department vehicles, nor to perform any other duty-related functions with a measurable quantity of alcohol, marijuana, illicit drugs, or impairing prescription medication.
2. Fire Department members shall not perform any duty-related functions for a minimum of eight hours following the consumption of any alcoholic beverage. A longer waiting period may be required to ensure the individual is free of impairment.
3. The driver of any Fire Department vehicle involved in an accident that causes measurable property damage, injury or death may be tested for the presence of alcohol or drugs with the least possible delay.

## **VEHICLE EMISSIONS:**

Vehicles shall be turned off and locked, if appropriate, when non-emergency conditions permit. Fire Department members should recognize that additional fuel consumption and environmental pollution result from inappropriate vehicle operation.

## **VEHICLE POSITONING AND SCENE SAFETY:**

It shall be the Lakewood Fire Department policy to position apparatus and other emergency vehicles at the emergency incident in a manner that best protects the incident scene and work area and in accordance with standard operating practice for incident scene operations.

## **GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR DRIVER/OPERATORS:**

1. Under wet, foggy, and other hazardous weather/road conditions, emergency vehicles must react cautiously to conditions encountered and proceed accordingly.
2. The use of cell phones and other devices shall not interfere with the safe operation of the vehicle. Specifically, vehicle operators shall not use handheld devices while responding on incidents. Use of handheld devices when driving while not responding should be avoided. The use of handheld devices shall comply with the laws referenced below while driving any emergency vehicle.

## **MANEUVERING AT AN INCIDENT SCENE:**

1. Drivers shall exercise extreme caution while maneuvering emergency vehicles at an incident scene; other drivers and pedestrians may be distracted or preoccupied by events and a variety of hazards and inadvertently step in front of or behind a moving vehicle (i.e., downed, or low hanging power lines, limited visibility, and hazardous materials). Vehicles shall be moved slowly and cautiously, with spotters assigned to guide the driver in tight situations.
2. When streets have been closed to regular traffic, the emergency vehicle driver always remains fully responsible for the safe and prudent operation of the vehicle.
3. When operating at an incident scene where the streets have not been closed to regular traffic, fire department vehicles shall be positioned, parked, or staged in a manner that considers safety as a primary factor.

## **BACKING:**

Backing of fire department apparatus should be avoided whenever possible. Where backing is unavoidable, follow the procedures outlined in this guideline, and back up the least amount necessary to accomplish the maneuver.

Whenever backing the apparatus, the operator shall utilize at least one or more spotter(s) to watch for vehicles, people, or other obstructions especially in areas "blind" to the operator.

When backing an apparatus, the following rules shall be followed:

1. Spotters(s) will dismount the vehicle prior to backing.
2. Rear mounted backing cameras shall not be used in place of a spotter.
3. Spotters shall position themselves to be in visual contact with the apparatus driver.
4. When only one spotter is used, he/she will be positioned at the rear of the apparatus, in view of the operator.
5. Spotter shall survey around the vehicle to identify potential obstacles, including overhead obstructions.
6. Multiple spotters may be required in certain areas and all members performing spotting duties should be aware of traffic hazards in the backing area.
7. Under no circumstances is it acceptable for anyone to walk behind the apparatus and out of the line of sight of the driver while backing.
8. Spotters shall not ride on the tailboard, steps, or any exposed position of backing apparatus.
9. The operator shall roll the driver's side window down completely.

10. The operator shall make both verbal and visual contact with the spotter. If the operator cannot see the spotter, he/she must not move the apparatus. The operator and the spotter must maintain direct visual contact.
11. Spotters should use verbal commands, agreed upon hand signals, apparatus headsets if available, and portable radios to communicate with the apparatus driver.
12. The use of portable radios to communicate between the spotter and the operator may prove beneficial in certain circumstances i.e., loud environments (use operations channel).
13. All available means shall be used by the operator to view the area behind the Apparatus i.e., Mirrors, backup cameras but not as a replacement for a spotter.

The operator must stop immediately if he/she loses visual contact with a spotter.

14. Where apparatus must be backed where other vehicle traffic exists, day or night. The officer and crew shall dismount the apparatus and act as spotters, the apparatus emergency lights (if equipped with such lights) shall be operating, and traffic safety vests and/or turnout coat with visible retroreflective and fluorescent trim shall be worn by all spotters.
15. While backing at night, flashlights and (where applicable) accessory rear lighting should be used.
16. The operator is in control of the apparatus and therefore responsible for its movement. He/she should not move the apparatus until all spotters have been deployed and are in position in a backing situation.
17. When more than one spotter is being used, the operator will need to maintain contact with both. This means shifting his/her attention from one spotter to another frequently to safely move the apparatus.
18. If at any time the operator feels that the situation is not safe, he/she should stop the apparatus until the situation is corrected. This may mean getting out and walking round the apparatus and down the road where the apparatus is headed.
19. When backing into roadways or traffic, extreme caution must be exercised to ensure that all cross traffic is stopped prior to entering the roadway.
20. In congested or tight areas, the whole crew may be needed as spotters, including the Department Officer.
21. In congested or tight areas, one spotter may be needed at the rear and one at the front of the apparatus being moved either forward or backwards and the Department Officer to act as safety.
22. Spotters should also be used when going forward in tight areas, to avoid hitting objects.

Under circumstances where the apparatus is manned by only a driver, the driver should attempt to utilize any available Fire Department personnel to act as a spotter. Caution shall be used if spotters



are dismounting near moving traffic. The apparatus shall be positioned in a manner to stop all traffic to allow spotters to safely dismount the apparatus

LEGAL REFERENCES:

N.J.S.A. 39:3-54.12 Rights of Motor Vehicle with Emergency Lights in Operation

N.J.S.A. 39:3-54.19 Subject to Traffic Laws; Right-Of-Way or Sirens; Yielding Right of Way

N.J.S.A. 39:3-10k Exemption for Operators of Certain Emergency, Other Equipment or Vehicles

§ 1004.3 Authorized Emergency Vehicles