

# DALTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

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<i>Subject</i> <b>Investigations of Motor Vehicle Collisions</b>			
<i>Reference</i> <b>CALEA Standards – 61.2.1, 61.2.2</b>		<i>Revised</i> <b>December <del>15, 2020</del> 20, 2022</b>	
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## I. Policy

It is the policy of the Dalton Police Department to respond to, investigate, and report all motor vehicle collisions that occur within the city limits of Dalton.

## II. Responsibilities

- A. Motor vehicle collision investigations are the primary responsibility of the Officer assigned to the district in which ~~it~~ **they** occurs. If unavailable, then the first Officer on the scene shall be responsible for the investigation and completion of required reports.
- B. The Watch Commander or other shift Supervisor shall respond to all collisions that involve fatalities, serious injuries that may result in death, and others, upon request, to assist in coordinating the completion of required tasks.
- C. When collisions involve fatalities and / or serious injuries that may result in death, the on-call Traffic Enforcement Unit (TEU) Investigator shall be notified by the Watch Commander, other shift Supervisor, or Whitfield County 911 Center. The TEU Investigator shall be responsible for investigating collisions involving fatalities and / or serious injuries that may result in death.
- D. The Dalton Fire Department shall be notified and respond to the scene of motor vehicle collisions in which fire, threat of fire, or hazardous materials are present or occupants are trapped in vehicles.

## III. Procedures for Responding Officers

- A. Officers shall respond to the collision scene in a safe manner, so as to not endanger themselves or the public.
- B. Patrol vehicles should be positioned in a manner that safely protects the Officers and the crash scene.
- C. Officers shall wear a Department-issued reflective traffic vest while conducting

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investigations of collisions that are located in the roadway.

- D. Officers shall render first aid, as needed. Victims should not be moved unless it is necessary to protect them from further injury.
- E. After assessing the collision scene, Officers should notify the Whitfield County 911 Center of requests for EMS, Dalton Fire Department, tow trucks, Dalton Public Works, utilities personnel, and / or other assistance, as needed. Additional Officers may also be needed to assist when major traffic congestion is ~~caused from~~ **created by** the collision.
- F. The collision scene shall be protected from bystanders and secured until it has been completely processed. Particular attention should be given to the preservation of short-lived evidence, such as tire marks and the location of debris from the collision. Crime scene tape may be used to cordon off the collision scene.
- G. A safe traffic pattern shall be established around the collision scene. Officers may create detours around the scene by directing traffic onto alternate roadways.
- H. Officers shall attempt to locate witnesses and record the collision information, including driver, passenger, and vehicle information.
- I. Officers shall expedite the removal of vehicles and debris from the roadway to prevent additional collisions.
- J. Disturbances between involved parties should be subdued as quickly as possible.

#### IV. **On-Scene Collision Investigation Tasks**

- A. Interview Principals and Witnesses
  - 1. Identify drivers. Ask for drivers' licenses and insurance cards, and retain them until the investigation is complete.
  - 2. Separate and interview drivers. Use tact and diplomacy in stifling any emotional outbursts.
  - 3. Evaluate driver behavior for any signs of impairment (alcohol, drugs, illness, fatigue, etc.).
  - 4. If subjects are in a state of anger or anxiety, which might make immediate interviews unprofitable, allow a few minutes for them to regain their composure.
  - 5. Interview passengers and other witnesses to ~~have~~ **establish** a basis for evaluating the drivers' accounts.
  - 6. Officers should use a body-worn camera or the audio / video camera system in the patrol vehicle to record witness / driver statements made during investigations.

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B. Examine / Record Vehicle Contributors to Collision and Damage

1. Generally, vehicle condition may be suspected as a contributing factor whenever a poorly maintained or deteriorated vehicle is involved in a collision.
2. Examine the condition / operability of major components, such as the wheels, tires, brakes, steering, and seat belts.
3. **If an older vehicle is involved**, look at the speedometer reading, which is usually zero, but may be locked at a speed reading approximately that at the time of the crash.
4. Doors may be locked or may have been forced open by the collision.
5. The interior of a vehicle can be damaged (steering wheel, dashboard, etc.)
6. A vehicle's windshield may be damaged.
7. Rust accumulation can be an indicator of pre-collision damage.
8. A vehicle may show other collision damage, such as dents, broken glass, collapsed parts, paint transfer, etc.

C. Examine / Record Effects of Collision on the Roadway

1. Underbody debris, such as mud, rust, tar, etc., can be jarred loose and may indicate the point of impact and movements of the vehicle after contact.
2. Vehicular parts can be implanted in or left adhered to the roadway.
3. Vehicular fluids can assist in determining the point of impact.
4. Tire imprints show the position and direction of a vehicle on the roadway. Most imprints are not durable and disappear rapidly.
5. Skid marks indicate the position and track of the tires leaving them, that the wheels were locked by hard braking by the driver, and the minimum speed of the vehicle. The absence of skid marks at the scene of a collision could indicate faulty evasive action, delayed perception, inadequate braking by the driver, or a faulty brake system. However, skid marks are uncommon when crashes involve vehicles with a functional anti-lock braking system (ABS) and / or adverse weather conditions.
6. Tire scuffmarks (yaw marks) are left on the road by tires that are sliding while the wheel is still rolling.
7. Damage to roadside objects, such as walls, fences, signs, poles, vegetation, etc., can show the pathway of a vehicle after leaving the roadway and can be matched to vehicular damage.

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8. Other miscellaneous road marks include pieces of clothing or a blood smear left by a dragged or ejected body.

D. Take Measurements

1. Measurements are generally required in connection with collisions involving fatalities, injuries that may result in death, hit and run with injuries, and unusual collisions.
2. Areas that are usually measured include skid mark lengths, road width, possible point of impact, and final resting place of the vehicles. If necessary, Officers may need to place barriers to guard the item being measured.
3. Officers should try to measure temporary and short-lived evidence as soon as time permits.

E. Photograph the Collision Scene

1. Photographs may not be necessary for minor collisions, but Officers should try to take photographs as often as possible and in all injury, fatality, and hit and run collisions.
2. Photographs taken at collision scenes shall be uploaded to and stored on the Department's Record Management System or submitted to the Property and Evidence Section. [Photographs shall not be uploaded to the Georgia Electronic Accident Reporting System \(GEARS\).](#)

F. Collect / Preserve Physical Evidence

1. Collection of collision-related evidence may not be necessary for minor accidents.
2. The kinds of materials that may serve as evidence include headlight fragments, scrapings of paint, hair, skin, and fibers. Short-lived evidence, such as tire prints, skid marks, and bloodstains, must be protected from traffic and bystanders until it has been photographed.
3. If evidence must be moved or may be destroyed prior to recording it, the exact position of the item should be marked for later measurement.

G. Protect Personal Property

The investigating Officer shall ensure that property belonging to collision victims is protected from theft or pilferage.

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#### H. Vehicle Towing

If a vehicle is damaged to the point that it is unable or unsafe to be driven away from a collision scene, a tow truck shall be called to remove the vehicle. The procedure for choosing a tow truck shall be made in accordance with policy GO91-4.7, Impounding, Towing, and Inventory of Vehicles.

#### I. Enforcement Action

Enforcement action ~~may~~ **should** be taken when the investigating Officer has detected a violation of a traffic law and when evidence exists to satisfy all the elements of that particular violation. An Officer may also choose to take enforcement action on any other violation discovered during the collision investigation.

### V. **Reporting**

#### A. Roadway Collisions

1. Roadway refers to that portion of the highway **or street** improved, designed, or ordinarily used for vehicular traffic, exclusive of the berm or shoulder.
2. All collisions initiated on the roadway, which result in the injury or death of any person, property damage to the apparent extent of \$500 or more, or upon a driver request, shall be reported on the Georgia Uniform Motor Vehicle Accident Report (DMVS 523). Officers shall complete the electronic version of this form using the Georgia Electronic Accident Reporting System (GEARS).
3. ~~If there is insufficient space on the report for injuries, witnesses, or remarks, or if new information needs to be added to an existing report, a GEARS Supplemental Report shall be used.~~ **The GEARS system provides a procedure for the reporting of additional injuries, witnesses, remarks, or other new information, when necessary to add additional information to an existing report.**
4. All roadway collisions shall be reported according to the Georgia Uniform Vehicle Accident Report Instruction Guide and / or the Georgia Electronic Accident Reporting System Resource Guide.

#### B. Private Property Collisions

1. Private property refers to any property that is not owned or leased by any government and that the public may or may not have access to. Examples include driveways, privately-owned streets, shopping center parking lots, and other private parking areas.

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2. Officers shall report private property collisions on a Private Property Accident Report Form for hit and run collisions, collisions when offenses have occurred in which charges can be made, damage to public or private property, public vehicles, collisions involving extensive damage, or in unusual and complicated collisions. Officers shall use the electronic version of this form for reporting through the Georgia Electronic Accident Reporting System (GEARS).
3. In other collisions occurring on private property, the Officer should distribute and explain the Personal Report of an Accident form.

VI. **Collisions Requiring More Complete Officer Response**

A. Collisions Involving Fatalities and / or Serious Injuries That May Result in Death

1. The first Officer on scene shall follow the procedures outlined in Section III of this directive.
2. The Watch Commander or other shift Supervisor shall be notified and respond to the scene.
3. The Watch Commander, other shift Supervisor, or Whitfield County 911 Center shall notify a TEU Investigator. If a TEU Investigator is not on duty, the on-call Investigator shall be contacted.
4. The Supervisor, upon arrival at the scene, shall assume responsibility and control until the TEU Investigator arrives. At that time, control of the scene shall be relinquished to the TEU Investigator.
5. Officers on-scene shall not alter the collision scene or move any evidence, unless absolutely necessary to administer first aid or rescue, until directed to do so by the TEU Investigator.
6. Upon arrival of the TEU Investigator, the Officers on-scene shall remain as long as necessary to aid the TEU Investigator.
7. The investigation of these collisions may include:
  - a. Obtaining the driver's license or identity of the ~~victim~~ injured or deceased person(s), if possible.
  - b. Photographing and / or videotaping the collision scene and all evidence, vehicles, bodies, etc.
  - c. Noting the position of all vehicles, evidence, bodies, etc. involved

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- by completing a field sketch. Initial measurements may be taken to assist with the investigation.
- d. Marking the position of all vehicles, evidence, bodies, etc. with spray paint, when necessary. In some cases, markers may be affixed to the roadway or other property instead of using spray paint.
  - e. Interviewing all witnesses and other parties. ~~It is preferred that~~ When possible, these interviews shall be recorded on audio and video.
  - f. Collecting of evidence in accordance with policy GO88-4.10, Property and Evidence Policy and Procedure. Evidence may include victim's clothing, cell phones, vehicle parts, items from inside vehicles, etc.
  - g. Impounding all vehicles involved in the collision to be held for more extensive investigation. The impounded vehicles shall be towed by the "list" towing service.
  - h. Notifying the closest relative of the deceased or seriously injured, in accordance with policy GO91-4.19, Emergency Death, Serious Injury, or Serious Illness Notification.
  - i. Creating a scale diagram of the collision scene.
- 8. From witness statements / physical evidence on the scene, the TEU Investigator shall investigate and determine the cause of the collision, which could include reconstruction, if necessary.
  - 9. The Patrol Division Commander or his / her designee may authorize the use of expert and technical assistance. This may include assistance from a collision reconstruction Officer, surveyors, mechanics, physicians, or other specialists, as needed.
  - 10. Assistance from the Criminal Investigations Division and / or District Attorney Investigator may be needed.
  - 11. The case file for each collision involving fatalities and / or serious injuries that may result in death shall be kept by the TEU Investigator. The case file should include field sketches, diagrams, photographs, witness statements, case notes, and any other pertinent documentation. Case files shall be made available to the District Attorney's office for prosecution of the case.
  - 12. The Georgia Department of Motor Vehicle Safety shall be notified of all

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fatalities occurring on public roadways. This notification shall be made by facsimile or email by using the DMVS Fatality Notification form.

B. Hit and Run Collisions

1. The first Officer on scene shall follow the procedures outlined in Section III of this directive.
2. Information regarding the offender vehicle shall be obtained, and a lookout shall be given to other on-duty Officers and the Whitfield County 911 Center.
3. The investigation of hit and run collisions shall follow the procedures laid out in section IV of this directive.
4. Evidence, such as broken glass, lenses, or paint transfer, may be collected to assist in identifying the offender vehicle.
5. Officers investigating hit and run collisions shall attempt to locate the offender vehicle and driver. If the vehicle and / or driver are identified, that information shall be added to the collision report.

C. D.U.I. Collisions

Officers investigating motor vehicle collisions involving D.U.I. on public or private property shall follow all investigation procedures set forth in this directive and policy GO04-4.24, Detection and Arrests of Impaired Drivers.

VII. **Special Situations**

A. Fire Hazards

Whenever a fire hazard exists, the first arriving Officer shall assess the hazard and take immediate action as follows:

1. Check the vehicle for occupants then clear the area if there is a risk of personal injury.
2. Extinguish the fire, if possible, and advise the Whitfield County 911 Center to notify Dalton Fire Department of the action taken.
3. Request Dalton Fire Department assistance for fires which are too involved to be extinguished with equipment on hand.

B. Hazardous Materials

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Officers responding to collisions involving hazardous materials shall follow the procedures outlined in policy GO92-6.2, Hazardous Materials Incident Response. The Officers' response at the scene will vary depending on the type / amount of hazardous material encountered. Whenever the presence of hazardous materials is suspected, the first Officer on scene shall assess the hazard and take the appropriate action.

C. Collisions Involving Department Vehicles

1. All motor vehicle collisions involving Department vehicles shall be investigated and reported.
2. A Supervisor shall be notified of all collisions involving Department vehicles.
3. Photographs of the collision scene, including damage to the Department vehicle, other vehicles, and / or property shall be taken.
4. If a Department vehicle is damaged to the point that it is unable or unsafe to be driven away from a collision scene, a Department-approved tow service shall be used.
5. A copy of the completed collision report and photographs shall be forwarded to the Property and Evidence Section.

D. Extreme Weather Situations

1. In certain situations, such as snow or ice emergencies, Officers may not be able to investigate all motor vehicle collisions.
2. During these situations, drivers shall be notified by the Whitfield County 911 Center to exchange information and report collisions involving only property damage at the Police Services Center after the extreme weather situation has subsided.
3. With safety being the main concern, Officers shall continue to respond to collisions involving injuries during these situations.

*This policy supersedes any previous policies issued.*

**BY ORDER OF**

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**CHIEF OF POLICE**

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