|  |
| --- |
| ***REPLACE WITH YOUR MASTHEAD*** |
| **VFIS logo black JPG** | **SOG Title:** |
| **SOG Number:** |
| **Original Date:** | **Revision Date:** |
| **ABC Fire Department General Operating Guideline** |

**Responding in Private Vehicle**

***This is a sample of a standard operating guideline (SOG) on this topic. You should review the content, modify as appropriate for your organization, have it reviewed by your leadership team and if appropriate your legal counsel. Once adopted, make sure the SOG is communicated to members, implemented and performance monitored for effective implementation.***

**Purpose:**

To establish guidelines governing the response to department events/incidents in privately owned vehicles (POVs).

**Scope:**

All personnel.

**Procedure:**

Personnel must operate their POV in a safe and prudent manner when traveling to and from incidents, the station, meeting locations, etc. to reduce deaths, injury and property damage. Personnel must use seat belts while operating POVs.

Most volunteer emergency service departments rely heavily on the ability of their members to respond to calls, either to the scene or the station, in their personal vehicles. While this is essential to the organization's ability to react to emergencies in a timely manner, there are also inherent risks.

**Motor Vehicle Laws**

The most significant risk associated with allowing volunteers to respond in their personal vehicles is that they may operate them as if they are emergency vehicles. All too often, this leads to accidents. While motor vehicle laws vary from state to state, all states address this issue similarly: personal vehicles are not emergency vehicles and are not permitted the same, if any, exemptions to motor vehicle laws. For example, while licensed emergency vehicles are allowed to exceed the posted speed limit, move against the normal flow of traffic and proceed through a negative intersection control device, personal vehicles driven by volunteers are required to obey the state motor vehicle code.

**Courtesy Lights**

Some motor vehicle codes address the use of blue or red "courtesy lights." Basically, these are a visual request asking other drivers to allow you to pass them upon your approach. They are not a demand for right of way, nor do they permit the driver to illegally pass or speed up to overtake any vehicle.

**Alternative Solutions**

Your organization may wish to reduce or eliminate the risks associated with members responding in their personal vehicles by looking at alternative ways of getting personnel to where they are needed. For example, the development and use of regular duty crews (members staffing predetermined shifts) would eliminate the need to have large numbers of volunteers responding to every call. A duty crew could staff at least a full first unit response, which can usually handle most calls.

**Standard Operating Procedures**

If your members are going to continue to respond to calls in personal vehicles, your organization should reduce the risk of death or injury to them and to the general public by developing and enforcing standard operating procedures (SOPs). These procedures should include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Volunteers responding in personal vehicle must obey their state motor vehicle code with respect to courtesy light and siren privileges.
2. Courtesy lights must not be used by volunteers as a license to operate their personal vehicles as if they are emergency vehicles. All courtesy lights should be approved by the chief of the department and a written permit issued. The permit should include the "rules of the road" that apply.
3. Volunteer members responding in personal vehicles should never exceed the posted speed limit.
4. Volunteer members responding in personal vehicles should come to a complete stop at all stop signs and red traffic signals and must wait for normal right of way before proceeding.
5. Procedures for at-the-scene parking/staging should be included in all SOPS.
6. Individual volunteer members must have personal auto liability insurance with appropriate liability limits that protect not only the volunteer but also your organization.
7. Personal vehicle response should not occur with non-members in the vehicle (this includes family, friends and children).

Once they are developed, SOPs should be included in all new member orientations and driver training sessions. Every member should receive a written copy of your SOPs and sign off that they have received them and understand them. In addition, your organization should develop written enforcement and progressive discipline guidelines for any member who violates your procedures.

When your volunteers respond to calls, they need to understand that, first and foremost, they must arrive at the emergency scene or the station safely in order to be of any help to the public.

***This is a sample guideline furnished to you by VFIS. Your organization should review this guideline and make the necessary modifications to meet your organization’s needs. The intent of this guideline is to assist you in reducing exposure to the risk of injury, harm or damage to personnel, property and the general public. For additional information on this topic, contact your VFIS Risk Control representative.***

**References:**

VFIS “Manage your Risk – Personal Vehicle Response”

NVFC "Emergency Vehicle Safe Operations For Volunteer and Small Combination Emergency Service Organizations"