



RICHMOND POLICE DEPARTMENT GENERAL ORDER



Subject: EMERGENCY AND NON-EMERGENCY VEHICLE RESPONSE PROTOCOL	Chapter 6	Number 7	# Pages 7
References: CALEA: 41.2.1a, 41.2.1b, 41.2.1c, 41.2.1d, 81.2.4g VA State Code: §46.2-920, 46.2-1022, 46.2-1023, 46.2-1029.1	Related Orders: 09-03	Effective Date: 12/30/2025 Revised By: Annual Review Prv. Rev. Date: 04/14/2022	
If any provision of this General Order conflicts with any collective bargaining article, the collective bargaining agreement shall govern.			
Chief of Police: <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;"></div>			

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this directive is to establish a standard operating procedure for the safe operation of police vehicles when responding to both emergency and non-emergency calls for service.

II. SUMMARY OF CHANGE

This revision outlines the classification of priority calls and response codes. All changes shall be in bold and italicized text.

III. POLICY

The Richmond Police Department’s responses to calls for service and for prescribing the number of police units to be dispatched are based upon a number of factors. The number of vehicles responding to a call for service and the response code shall be determined by departmental policy and controlled by the on-duty 911 Department of Emergency Communications Preparedness and Response (DECPR) Officers. It is also the policy of the Department that field supervisors and superior officers have the authority to increase or decrease the number of responding vehicles.

When operating Department vehicles under emergency response conditions, officers shall use lights and sirens. An officer’s primary responsibility when responding to an emergency situation is the safety of the officer and the welfare of the general public. Officers have a responsibility to respond to calls for service in accordance with the Department’s General Orders and other written directives. Any indiscriminate or uncontrolled police response to calls for service is neither prudent nor authorized. Although officers are given qualified exemptions under state law from observing certain traffic regulations in specific circumstances, they are required to drive with due regard for the safety of all persons (VA Code § 46.2-920).

IV. ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT

All employees are expected to fully comply with the guidelines and timelines set forth in this General Order. Responsibility rests with the Division Commander to ensure that any violations of policy are investigated and appropriate training, counseling and/or disciplinary action is initiated.

This directive is for internal use only and does not enlarge an employee's civil liability in any way. It should not be construed as the creation of a higher standard of safety or care in an evidentiary sense, with respect to third party claims. Violation of this directive, if proven, can only form the basis of a complaint by this Department, and then only in a non-judicial administrative setting.

V. DEFINITIONS

- A. EMERGENCY EQUIPMENT – The lights and siren on a police vehicle.
- B. EMERGENCY:
 - 1. A condition deemed to exist only in a situation where there is an indication that violence or injuries exist and shall likely continue or worsen or where a need prevails for immediate action toward the continued protection of life and property. In addition, a serious felony that involves an actual or threatened attack that an officer reasonably believes could or has resulted in death or serious bodily injury (e.g., Aggravated Assault, Armed Robbery, Murder, etc.).
 - 2. A situation in which the physical safety and well being of an individual requesting or needing police assistance is directly jeopardized. In these incidents, the primary, backup, and supervising units shall utilize both their lights and siren to respond to the scene in an expedited manner.
- C. NON-EMERGENCY– In situations where the officer is dispatched to a non-priority call, they shall not use their emergency equipment when responding. If in route to the call and it changes to a high priority call, the officer shall activate their emergency equipment for a faster response. [CALEA 41.2.1a]
- D. MARKED UNIT – A police vehicle equipped with a police package (i.e. conspicuous police markings, emergency lights and siren) and able to engage in radio communications.
- E. UNMARKED UNIT – A police vehicle able to engage in radio communications *that* does not contain conspicuous police markings, emergency lights or siren.
- F. UNMARKED, POLICE EQUIPPED UNIT – A police vehicle able to engage in radio communications that is equipped with emergency lights and siren but does not contain conspicuous police markings.
- G. [REDACTED]

H. [REDACTED]

VI. PROCEDURE

A. Officers shall acknowledge radio assignments, give current location, verbally mark [REDACTED] and use the [REDACTED] function key on the mobile data computer when they arrive near the scene of an incident.

B. Emergency Operation of Police Vehicles – (General): [CALEA 41.2.1b]

1. Only a police vehicle equipped with a siren and emergency flashing lights shall be operated as an emergency vehicle. Both the siren and the emergency flashing lights must be activated when operating under emergency conditions or in an emergency capacity.

NOTE: The use of either siren or emergency lights alone shall not qualify the police vehicle as an emergency vehicle (VA Code §§ 46.2-1022, 46.2-1023 and 46.2-1029.1) and the vehicle must be driven in compliance with all traffic laws.

2. Unmarked police vehicles with concealed emergency lights must use extreme caution in assuming the right-of-way, where the concealed mounting of the lights prevents the clear vision or observation of those lights by the general public.

C. Classification of Emergency Calls for Service: [CALEA 41.2.1b]

Emergency classifications are assigned to those calls for service meeting the definition of an Emergency as defined in this policy. Examples of emergency calls include but are not limited to the following:

1. Police Officer is in immediate harm and needs assistance, [REDACTED] or “Mayday”;
2. Person(s) shot or person with a deadly weapon;
3. In-progress calls such as Aggravated Assault, Burglary, Breaking and Entering, Sex Offenses or Robbery;
4. Traffic crash/accidents involving serious injury and/or a fatality;
5. Calls in which a violent perpetrator is still on the premises, not just in the vicinity;
6. Hold-up alarms for businesses during business hours;
7. Riot or large disturbances involving violence or the credible threat thereof;
8. Verbal communications or other sounds that may lead DECPR to believe that the officer or others are in danger; or,

9. If the status of a non-emergency call for service changes or DECPR determines that the call should be upgraded to an emergency call.

D. Calls for Service Prioritization: [CALEA 41.2.1c]

1. The Department's **dispatching calls for service** priorities are: Response Code 1 – Emergency and Response Code 2 – Non-Emergency.
2. DECPR is responsible for prioritizing and assigning all incoming calls for service based on the individual nature **and severity** of the call. **Police unit(s) shall be dispatched when circumstances dictate.**
3. **Police calls are identified by event type and sub-type that automatically assigns one of seven possible priority categories.**
 - a) **PRIORITY 0 – Calls classified as Priority 0 include situations where a known crisis exists that threatens the life of an individual. This is the highest possible priority and the fastest possible desired response. The DECPR's objective is to have units enroute to the call [REDACTED] by the Emergency Communications Officer (ECO).**
 - b) **PRIORITY 1 – Calls classified as Priority 1 include situations where an imminent threat to personal safety, or the loss or damage to property exists. Conditions at the scene of the call are unstable. The DECPR's objective is to have a unit enroute [REDACTED] by the ECO.**
 - c) **PRIORITY 2 – Calls classified as Priority 2 include situations where threat of harm exists at the scene of the call and timely police response is required. The DECPR's objective is to assign the call at the earliest opportunity, [REDACTED] by the ECO.**
 - d) **PRIORITY 3 – Calls classified as Priority 3 include situations where the possibility of immediate threat or harm exist at the scene of the call. A timely police response is desirable. The DECPR's objective is to have the calls assigned at the earliest opportunity.**
 - e) **PRIORITY 4 – Calls classified as Priority 4 include situations where conditions are stable at the scene of the call. The DECPR's objective is to have calls assigned at the earliest opportunity.**
 - f) **PRIORITY 5 – Calls classified as Priority 5 include non-emergency report calls.**
 - g) **PRIORITY 6 – Calls with no crime in progress, no injury, no imminent danger of any kind to life or property, and no community disorder. These include DPR calls as well as calls the sector officer is responsible for managing. (See G.O. 09-03, Differential Police Response).**

4. ***Calls ranging from Priority 0-2 shall have a [REDACTED] Calls prioritized from 3-6 shall have a [REDACTED]***
5. The number of vehicles responding to a particular call, based on the response code, shall be controlled by the on-duty communications officer. Field supervisors and superior officers have the authority to increase or decrease the number of responding vehicles.

E. Protocols for Response Codes:

1. Response Code 1 – Emergency – A [REDACTED] shall be used and the call shall be simulcast on [REDACTED] for officer safety purposes.

NOTE: Mayday calls are Response Code 1 calls. Upon a [REDACTED] or “Mayday” transmission, verbal communication or other sound that may lead the Communication Officer(s) to believe that an officer(s) is in danger, DECPR shall immediately simulcast [REDACTED] and broadcast the call on [REDACTED]. [CALEA 81.2.4g]

2. Response Code 2 – Non-Emergency: ***No tone, and the call is dispatched on the primary channel; reserved for all other calls for service or situations not prioritized as Emergency*** Response (Response Code 1). [CALEA 41.2.1a]

NOTE: Due to the nature of some typically classified Response Code 2 calls, the call may be elevated to a Response Code 1 based on the information received by DECPR.

F. Sector Unit Assignment (by Response Code):

1. Response Code 1 – Emergency: These calls for service shall be assigned to the nearest two (2) distinct units, regardless of the number of officers assigned to each unit. The units closest to the incident, regardless of sector assignment, shall be responsible for responding to the scene of the incident. An immediate response is required. [CALEA 81.2.4g]
2. Response Code 2 – Non-Emergency: These calls for service shall be assigned to a single sector unit, if available. Officers shall respond without delay to these calls for service.

G. Vehicle Response Protocols (by Response Code): [CALEA 41.2.1d]

1. Response Code 1 – Emergency:
 - a) When operating under Response Code 1, officers must use lights and sirens. Officers shall utilize their emergency equipment when assigned a Response Code 1 call for service as either the primary or secondary unit. The supervisor responding to such calls shall also respond using such equipment. On Mayday calls, only the [REDACTED] are pre-authorized to use Response Code 1, unless otherwise authorized by a

supervisor. The first unit arriving on scene shall act as the Incident Commander and have the authority to increase or decrease the number of responding vehicles until such time that the first police supervisor arrives on the scene.

NOTE: An officer's primary responsibility when responding on a Response Code 1 call for service is the safety of the officer and the welfare of the general public. Officers are never relieved of the responsibility of driving with due regard for the safety of all persons and property.

- b) Officers and supervisors operating emergency vehicles, when the vehicle is being used in the performance of public services and when operating the vehicle under emergency conditions:
 - (1) Shall not exceed the posted speed limit more than [REDACTED] on city streets and on all controlled access highways, such as: Interstates, the Chippenham Parkway, the Downtown Expressway, etc. The maximum safe speed, from [REDACTED] shall be determined by the responding officer, taking into consideration the seriousness of the incident, traffic conditions, weather conditions, vehicle conditions and the potential for other officer(s) who are closer to the incident to render assistance.
 - (2) Must be able to come to a complete stop if necessary, at any steady or flashing red signal, traffic, stop sign or other such traffic stopping device. Officers may avoid a complete stop if the intersection can be cleared prior to entering it, using due regard for the safety of themselves and citizens.
 - (3) Verbally mark [REDACTED] and use the [REDACTED] function key on the Mobile Data Computer when they arrive near the scene of the incident.

2. Response Code 2 – Non-Emergency: [CALEA 41.2.1a]

- a) Officers shall obey all applicable traffic laws; and,
- b) If the status of a Response Code 2 call for service changes to a Response Code 1, the responding officer(s) shall operate the police vehicle in accordance with the aforementioned vehicle response protocol for Response Code 1 calls for service.

H. Supervisory Responsibilities (Response Code 1):

- 1. The first police supervisor on the scene of any Response Code 1 call for service shall relieve the primary unit as the Incident Commander and may request any other emergency response that is deemed necessary beyond the primary and secondary response units. The Incident Commander must mark [REDACTED]

2. The Precinct Sergeant (responsible for the activities of the Sector officers) is responsible for ensuring that the Department's emergency response protocol is followed in Response Code 1 situations. All supervisors have a responsibility to act, if deemed appropriate, to correct actions of employees.
 3. Whenever an "Officer Needs Assistance" or "Mayday" is called, the supervisor of the officer calling the emergency situation shall complete the Mayday Summary Report (PD-50) and forward the form, through channels, to the Precinct/Division Commander and the appropriate Major for review. After the Major of the affected Service has reviewed the PD-50, the original copy of the PD-50 shall be forwarded to the *Court Liaison Sergeant, assigned to Internal Affairs.*
- I. Handling Requests for Emergency Assistance from Outside Emergency Service Agencies:
1. When a member of DECPR receives information that there is a situation that requires an emergency response and the nature of the request is based on in-progress violent actions, the on-duty Communications Officer shall issue [REDACTED]. The [REDACTED] shall respond as a Response Code 1 call for service, utilizing emergency lights and siren.
 2. If the request is not of an emergency nature, the call for service shall be logged as a Response Code 2 call for service.
- J. Display of blue lights by marked vehicles on duty:
1. If a departmental vehicle is equipped with the technology permitting the permanent display of solid blue LED lights illuminating the front and the rear of the light bar positioned on the top of marked police vehicles, the officer or supervisor operating that vehicle shall ensure that the lights are *always* on display when operating the vehicle. The following are the only exceptions (when the lights may be deactivated.)
 - a) When, *at* the officer's discretion, the display of the lights during the response to the call for service is not considered a tactical or safe approach.
 - b) Speed enforcement.

VII. FORMS

- A. PD-50, Mayday Summary Report
- B. Incident Based Report (IBR)