

RISK COMMUNIQUÉ

Emergency Vehicle Driver/Operator Requirements

Emergency vehicle drivers have in their care, custody and control most of the major assets possessed by your organization (the vehicle, portable equipment, and personnel). Emergency vehicle drivers should also make every attempt possible to provide due regard for the safety of others. The safe operation of these vehicles, particularly during emergency response, depends greatly on the ability and skills of the driver.

With so much, literally riding in the driver's hands, your organization should select drivers based on specific benchmarked criteria. Selecting, training and maintaining good, safe drivers should not be left to chance. A comprehensive Emergency Vehicle Operations Program should address all of the following areas:

- selection criteria for drivers
- training requirements
- restrictions on inexperienced drivers
- disciplinary actions for driving violations
- written emergency vehicle response safety guidelines
- documented preventative maintenance program
- accident investigation program
- medical evaluations

Your organization can maximize the good qualities of a driver and minimize any negative aspects, by proactively addressing the key issues of emergency driving and by following the prescribed guidelines provided in this recommendation.

Your organization must be cautious that the procedures and guidelines that you develop are reasonable for your particular organization and can be routinely maintained, monitored and enforced.

Standard Operating Guidelines

In today's emergency service organizations, there is a need for the development and use of standard operating guidelines and issue specific training. One of the areas that require a great deal of attention is the operation of emergency vehicles.

Chief Officers, as well as drivers, need to recognize the fact that the emergency vehicle response is the basis for the success or failure of all other emergency functions. These expensive vehicles carry all of the portable emergency equipment in addition to all of the personnel of the organization. Without the safe conveyance of these vehicles to the emergency scene, the emergency service organization cannot achieve its mission of saving lives and protecting property.

Having sound emergency vehicle response guidelines in place will assist the emergency service organization in providing direction to its officers and drivers. These Emergency Vehicle Response Safety guidelines should include, but not be limited to, the following:

- a) intersection approach guidelines
- b) maximum response speeds
- c) driver and officer responsibilities
- d) warning device usage and limitations
- e) backing guidelines
- f) personal private vehicle response

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VFIS has developed sample guidelines that may be used to implement, supplement or enhance your emergency vehicle response policies and provide the basis for driver training for your organization.

Accident Investigation

Reducing accidents and injuries and preventing re-occurrence should be the goal of any accident investigation program. Your organization should complete a safety analysis of vehicle incidents and crashes as well as, all near misses. The root cause(s) of the loss or near miss should be determined and corrective action(s) taken by your organization to try to prevent any future losses.

Advice on how to conduct the investigation and how to protect and preserve your findings can be obtained from legal counsel.

The VFIS Emergency Vehicle Accident Investigation Form and the booklet Accident Investigation for Emergency Service Organizations are available for your organization's use. These are available from VFIS through your insurance agent or VFIS Regional Director.

Driver Selection Criteria

Age, Experience and Health

Youthful, middle aged and mature drivers all have positive and negative qualities that they bring with them when they sit behind the steering wheel. Youthful drivers may have quicker reactions, but may lack driving experience and the ability to control their emotions. Middle aged drivers may have good experience, but may be complacent about their abilities and the need to maintain their skills and training. They may also have un-discovered medical conditions. Mature drivers may be cautious and experienced, but may have declining physical abilities or ailments which may adversely affect their capability to safely operate emergency vehicles.

VFIS recommends that the following criteria be adopted by your organization to reduce the exposure presented by the operation of your emergency vehicles:

Age and Maturity

- 1) Emergency vehicle drivers should not be under 18 years of age. This is particularly true for vehicles over 26,001 lbs GVW, which drivers under 18 years old are generally prohibited from operating under Federal DOT Regulations.
- 2) Youthful or inexperienced drivers of any age, should not be utilized as front line drivers until they become acceptable from an experience, maturity and training standpoint

Health

- 1) The Emergency Service Organization should provide a medical evaluation to determine the employee/member's ability to operate an emergency vehicle and its related tasks. The medical evaluation should be performed by a Physician or other licensed health care professional (PLHCP). A PLHCP is defined as an individual whose legally permitted scope of practice (i.e., license, registration, or certification MD, DO, RN, EMT-P, etc.) allows him or her to independently provide, or be delegated the responsibility to provide, some or all of the health care services required by your organization. This allows an organization some flexibility in determining what level or degree of medical evaluation is appropriate and affordable. The organization should strive to obtain the highest level of medical evaluation that they are able to, recognizing that a physician provided physical provides the most comprehensive evaluation. If an organization finds that it can not provide a physician provided physical, rather than do nothing, they should seek out the next highest level of practice available to them for as comprehensive an evaluation as that professional can provide.

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The Emergency Service Organization, in cooperation with the designated PLHCP, should establish medical evaluation criteria that should be utilized to determine an individual's health and fitness status, as it applies to their ability to safely perform the duties as an emergency vehicle driver/operator. The following is an example of medical evaluation criteria:

- a) Baseline medical evaluation prior to beginning training with specific criteria developed by the PLHCP
- b) Periodic medical evaluations such as:
 - (1) Age 18 to 29 - not less than every 3 years
 - (2) Age 30 to 49 - not less than every 2 years
 - (3) Over age 50 - annually

Experience

- 1) A Department of Motor Vehicles Driving Record Report (commonly referred to as a MVR) review, should be completed for every trainee before initial entry into their training phase and annually thereafter until the trainee has been qualified as a front line driver.
 - a) VFIS suggests that a MVR should be run on all drivers annually but not less than every three years. This report should reflect not more than two (2) Class B and *no* Class A violations in a three (3) year period (*see definitions*).

You should check with your state agency that provides MVRs for any requirements that your agency must meet regarding obtaining, evaluating and protecting these records.

Training and Education

In selecting emergency vehicle drivers, each age group has their own set of concerns that your organization should address to overcome or offset their weaknesses. New drivers especially need to understand the complexities and the physical dynamics of operating these large, heavy vehicles.

All drivers, regardless of age, experience or maturity, need to be trained to understand the laws and legal liabilities associated with operating an emergency vehicle. Additionally, all drivers need to have continuing and on-going refresher training to keep their skill and knowledge levels high, as well as, to identify and correct any deficiencies or bad habits that have developed. This applies to behind-the-wheel training and class room training.

VFIS recommends that the following *training & education* criteria be adopted by your organization to reduce the exposure presented by the operation of your emergency vehicles:

- 1) Successful completion of a recognized emergency vehicle driver training program which would include but not be limited to:
 - a) A minimum of 4 hours of classroom training concentrating on defensive driving, legal aspects of emergency vehicle operations, physical dynamics and review of departmental emergency vehicle response guidelines (SOG's). Written competency testing strongly recommended
 - b) 10 hours of documented behind-the-wheel training (initial vehicle and each different style of vehicle) Final road test with at least 2 training/qualifying officers. To help insure a more objective evaluation, consideration should be given to establishing fixed criteria for these evaluations. The criteria for each evaluator should include, but not limited to the following:

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- i) A minimum number of right turns
 - ii) A minimum number of left turns
 - iii) Two straight line backing exercises
 - iv) Two right turn backing exercises
 - v) Two left turn backing exercises
 - vi) One panic stop exercise
- c) Annual re-training until qualified as a front line driver
- d) Annual classroom refresher training. Focus on defensive driving, legal aspects of emergency vehicle operations, physical dynamics and review of departmental emergency vehicle response guidelines (SOG's).
- e) Behind-the-wheel re-training and/or re-certification, not less than every 3 years for all drivers.
- f) Drivers returning to driving duties from suspension of privileges and/or returning to active status after inactive for more than 6 months should be required to re-certify on the apparatus or vehicles previously qualified on.

VFIS has three training programs available that address the needs of the emergency vehicle driver and the suggested training objectives listed above. The Emergency Vehicle Driver Training Program, is a hands on program designed to provide training on the physical aspects of emergency vehicle driving. The VFIS program entitled Emergency Vehicle Response Safety addresses the theory of safe emergency response and the mental demands on the emergency vehicle driver. The third program, Dynamics of Emergency Vehicle Response, was developed specifically as a re-certification program. This program combines components of both Emergency Vehicle Driver Training, and the Emergency Vehicle Response Safety programs. Visual re-enforcement is provided by a supporting video that displays positive examples.

Department of Motor Vehicles MVR Evaluation Requirements

Class A Violations

An individual who has a Class A violation within the past three (3) years normally receives a license suspension from the Department of Motor Vehicles which issued the license. Examples of Class A violations are as follows:

- Driving while intoxicated or under the influence
- Homicide arising out of the use of a motor vehicle (gross negligence)
- Reckless endangerment involving a motor vehicle
- Operating during a period of suspension or revocation
- Using a motor vehicle for the commission of a felony
- Operating a motor vehicle without owner's authority
- Permitting an unlicensed person to drive
- Reckless driving

VFIS suggests suspension of driving privileges for anyone convicted of a Class A violation for a period of eighteen (18) months. Additionally, any of these individuals would also be required to be re-certified to operate emergency vehicles through successful completion of the organization's driver training program.

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Class B Violations

Class B violations are any moving violation or Point carrying violation, not considered a Class A violation. Speeding, unlawful lane change and traveling too fast for conditions are all examples of Class B violations.

VFIS suggests that any individual who has a combination of two (2) Class B moving violation convictions and/or chargeable accidents in a three (3) year period will be issued a warning letter from the chief officer or administrative officer of the emergency service organization.

Any individual who has a combination of three (3) moving violation convictions and/or chargeable accidents in a three (3) year period will be issued a suspension of driving department vehicles for a period of ninety (90) days by the chief officer or administrative office of the emergency service organization.

Any individual who has more than three (3) moving violation convictions or three (3) chargeable accidents or any combination of more than three (3) of the formerly stated violations in a three (3) year period will be issued a suspension of driving department vehicles for a period of one (1) year. In addition, the same individual would be required to complete an approved driver improvement program and be re-certified to operate emergency vehicles.

Note: Unusual circumstances with individual cases would be evaluated on a one-on-one basis.