

	SFASU POLICE DEPARTMENT	
	Policy 7.31 Accident Investigations	
	Effective Date: 05/07/19	Updated: 10/28/2020
	Approved: John Fields, Jr. Chief of Police	
	Reference: TBP 7.16 / IACLEA 10.2.1a-h, 10.2.2a-j, 10.3.1b and e	

I. POLICY

An objective of the department is the reduction of motor vehicle crashes. To accomplish this, the department performs a variety of functions such as providing emergency service to the injured, protecting the crash scene, conducting crash investigations and follow-ups, preparing reports, and taking proper enforcement action.

The purposes of crash investigations is to determine the cause of an automobile crash and to use the information to develop enforcement that will reduce crashes. Crash reports are used by the Department of Public Safety and the Department of Transportation at the state level, and by the university to study the frequency of crashes at a given location and time, the causes of crashes, and the road conditions that existed when the incident occurred. The reports are also used to develop selective enforcement programs, to provide engineering studies, and to promote street safety. For the purpose of this policy, the terms accident and crash have the same meaning.

II. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for the proper handling of traffic crashes and for the collection and use of data that will reduce automobile crashes resulting in property damage, injury, and death (IACLEA 10.2.1).

III. PROCEDURES – General

A. Crash report and investigation, general

1. Texas Transportation Code requirements concerning the reporting of traffic crashes include the following:
 - a. TTC 550.026. The driver of any vehicle involved in an accident resulting in death or injury shall immediately notify law enforcement officials.

- b. TTC 550.062. A law enforcement officer investigating an accident resulting in injury or death or total property damage to an apparent amount of \$1,000 or more shall make a written report of it to DPS.
 - c. TTC 550.062. Officers who investigate an accident for which a report must be made, either at the time of and at the scene of the accident, or thereafter and elsewhere, by interviewing participants or witnesses, shall within 10 days after completing the investigation forward a written report of the accident.
2. An officer shall respond to and prepare a report of a crash involving any of the following:
- a. Death or injury (IACLEA 10.2.1a).
 - b. Property damage in excess of \$1,000 (IACLEA 10.2.1b).
 - c. FSGI (Hit and Run) or FSRA (IACLEA 10.2.1c).
 - d. Impairment due to alcohol and/or drugs (IACLEA 10.2.1d).
 - e. Hazardous materials.
 - f. Involvement of any university property, vehicles, equipment, facilities, or personnel regardless of damage amount (IACLEA 10.2.1g).
 - g. Other public or mass transportation vehicles (IACLEA 10.2.1f).
 - h. Failure of either driver to produce a driver's license and proof of liability insurance.
3. Officers shall also be assigned to respond to the following:
- a. Any crash involving disturbances between drivers or passengers.
 - b. Crashes that create major traffic congestion.
 - c. Crashes in which vehicles are damaged to the extent that towing is required.
 - d. Patrol vehicles may be assigned to any other accident, not listed above, to assist persons involved with information exchange, such as accidents occurring on private property (IACLEA 10.2.1h).
 - e. Time permitting, officers may investigate and report on crashes as supervisors direct.

B. Responding to the crash scene

- 1. Officers shall respond to the scene of a minor crash under non-emergency responses unless the dispatcher or supervisor directs otherwise.

2. Officers shall respond emergency traffic to major crashes where there exist injuries or major road or highway blockages, or where information provided indicates the immediate need for an officer on scene.
3. Responding officers shall park their vehicles in a manner that will protect victims and the crash scene while leaving space for emergency service vehicles to arrive and react.

C. Crash scene responsibilities

1. The initial officer to arrive at a crash scene shall perform the following:
 - a. Administer any needed emergency medical care (basic life support measures) pending arrival of rescue personnel (IACLEA 10.2.2a).
 - b. Summon additional help as required. Examples include officers, EMS, fire department and wreckers (IACLEA 10.2.2b).
 - c. Protect the crash scene (IACLEA 10.2.2c).
 - d. Preserve short-lived evidence such as broken parts and skid marks (IACLEA 10.2.2d).
 - e. Establish a safe traffic pattern around the scene (IACLEA 10.2.2e).
 - f. Record key crash information and locate witnesses (IACLEA 10.2.2f).
 - g. Expedite removal of vehicles, persons, and debris from the roadway except for fatal crashes, in which case the scene is not to be disturbed (IACLEA 10.2.2g).
 - h. Identify, communicate and properly deal with hazardous materials or fire hazards (IACLEA 10.2.2h).
 - i. Respond and appropriately address disturbances between involved parties (IACLEA 10.2.2i).
 - j. Secure property of involved parties (IACLEA 10.2.2j).
2. The officer assigned to a crash shall have the responsibility and authority to request assistance from any other officers as needed. He or she becomes the primary investigating officer in charge at the scene unless the supervisor determines that it is appropriate to assign these responsibilities to another officer.
3. Crash reports need not be filled out if the accident occurred on private property and the damage does not exceed \$1,000 unless the supervisor specifically asks for a report (IACLEA 10.2.1h).

4. In case of extremely inclement weather where a crash involves only property damage, the dispatcher or officer may, with the supervisor's approval, perform the following:
 - a. Obtain information over the phone to complete the crash report and request that the involved drivers come to the department and file a report in person within 48 hours of the incident.
 - b. Complete a report showing the name, address, operator license number, and telephone number of each driver (TBP 7.16).

IV. PROCEDURES - Crash scene

A. Collecting information

1. At the scene of a crash, the investigating officer shall gather appropriate information for a report. Information to be collected at the scene may include, but is not limited to, the following:
 - a. sure that the principals exchange information, such as insurance carriers, names, and phone numbers (IACLEA 10.2.2f).

B. Follow-up activities

1. Follow-up activities that may be necessary include the following:
 - a. Obtain and record formal statements from witnesses.
 - b. Reconstruct the crash.
 - c. Submit evidentiary materials for laboratory examination.
 - d. Prepare crash or offense reports to support charges arising from the incident (IACLEA 10.2.1e).
2. In a particularly serious crash involving severe injuries, fatalities, or multiple vehicles, it may be necessary to summon expert or technical assistance from photographers, surveyors, mechanics, physicians, crash team specialists, or other specialists. Expert assistance shall be requested through a supervisor.
3. At the crash scene, the officer may take immediate enforcement action and issue a citation for observed violations or violations witnessed and supported by the investigative process. In death cases, the district attorney may decide the appropriate charge (IACLEA 10.2.1a).
4. If the investigating officer concludes that the crash was caused by a person driving under the influence of intoxicants (DWI) and the defendant is still at the scene, the DWI arrest shall be made before transport.

5. If the driver is transported to the hospital before the officer arrives and if the officer later concludes that the driver was intoxicated, an arrest warrant shall be obtained. If the driver is hospitalized, the warrant will be served when the driver is released (IACLEA 10.2.1d).
6. In other crash-related investigations, when the officer leaves the scene of the offense and later identifies an offender or offense, arrest warrants may be obtained. The citation can be issued at the hospital after the crash scene has been processed (IACLEA 10.2.1c).

C. Crash scene procedures

1. Upon notification of a crash, the officer assigned shall proceed promptly to the scene. If injuries have been reported, every effort should be made to avoid delay.
2. The patrol vehicle shall not be parked at the scene in a manner that will endanger pedestrians or motorists. The officer shall consider using the vehicle as a shield to protect the scene, short-lived evidence, those involved in the crash, and others working the scene, including the officer (IACLEA 10.2.2c and 10.2.2d).
3. The officer shall leave the vehicle emergency lights on.
4. At all times when investigating a crash on the streets or highways, the officer shall wear a reflector safety vest (IACLEA 10.3.1b).
5. Officers may use strobe lights to create an illuminated warning pattern to alert other drivers.
6. In case of fire danger from leaking or ruptured gas tanks or where the crash may involve hazardous materials, the on-scene officer shall summon the fire department.
 - a. All patrol vehicles are equipped with a copy of the current emergency response guidebook to aid in identifying vehicles carrying hazardous materials. The guidebook illustrates hazardous materials placards and identifies and describes the relevant hazard, appropriate emergency procedures, and evacuation procedures.
 - b. Any officer arriving at the scene of such a crash who sees hazardous materials placards shall immediately summon the fire department. The

fire chief and/or his/her designee will assume control of any scene involving hazardous materials and all officers shall provide support as required. The investigation of the crash shall begin after approval by the fire chief (IACLEA 10.2.2h).

7. Any valuable property belonging to crash victims shall be protected from theft or pilferage and, if owners are not present, it shall be taken into custody, tagged, and held for safekeeping until it is claimed by the owner. Examples include wallets, cell phones, weapons, medication and cash (IACLEA 10.2.2j).
8. University procedures requires any person clearing a wrecked or damaged vehicle from a roadway to remove any glass or other injurious substances dropped upon the highway. Where the quantity of accident debris is too great for the wrecker operator to do this, the university public works services shall be requested. The fire department shall assist in washing down combustible substances (IACLEA 10.2.2g).
9. If either driver is not present at the crash scene, do not assume that it is a hit/run unless further inquiry indicates the possibility. Perform the following actions if the incident appears to be a hit/run.
 - a. As soon as practicable, transmit the description of the vehicle and driver to dispatch, along with the direction of travel and time elapsed since the incident.
 - b. Process the crash scene as a crime scene.
10. Department personnel may utilize temporary traffic control devices such as barricades, temporary stop signs, traffic cones and emergency reflector triangles on university streets and parking lots (IACLEA 10.3.1e).

D. Crash report

1. A report shall be filed on all crashes that occur on public property, or publicly accessed private property within the university if it meets any of the normal reporting criteria (death, personal injury, property damage in excess of \$1,000, or involvement of government-operated vehicles).
 - a. Public property is any highway, roadway, street, or public parking lot maintained by the university, state, county, or city.
 - b. Publicly accessed private property is a private access way or parking area provided for a client of a business, but not residential property or private parking where a fee is charged for parking.

2. In the event of a crash that occurs on private property, a crash report may be filed if it meets any of the normal reporting criteria (death, personal injury, property damage in excess of \$1000, or involvement of government-operated vehicles).
3. Crashes that do not meet reporting requirements may still be reported by the vehicle operators using the “Texas Blue Form” (IACLEA 10.2.1h).

E. Disabled vehicles

1. Officers shall not push or tow any vehicle with a patrol vehicle unless the patrol vehicle is equipped with a department-approved push bar and the officer has been trained in its use.