





POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

	TRAFFIC COLLISION/CRASH INVESTIGATION	
	POLICY NUMBER: 61-4	ISSUING AUTHORITY 
	EFFECTIVE DATE: June 12, 2025	Christine A. Elow Police Commissioner

I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS AND GUIDELINES

Prompt response by police to the scene of a traffic collision may provide life-saving interventions and first aid to victims, safety of the scene, restoration of the flow of traffic, documentation for insurance purposes and any court proceedings, as well as a host of other functions.

Depending on the severity of the crash, the investigation could result in a police report taken over the phone or a full investigation and report by a certified reconstructionist. In the case of crashes involving serious injury or death, the investigation will be conducted by the Massachusetts State Police (MSP) or the Office of the District Attorney.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Cambridge Police Department to:

- A. respond to and investigate collisions involving vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians when appropriate and in accordance with city ordinance and state law;
- B. refer crashes involving serious injury or death to the Office of the District Attorney and the MSP;
- C. cooperate with and participate in City of Cambridge initiatives to reduce crashes on public roadways;
- D. provide basic training to all sworn officers in the fundamentals of crash scene response and advanced training for reconstructionists.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. *CARS Team*: Collision Analysis and Reconstruction Section of the MSP.
- B. *Crash Investigation*: A process that requires crash reporting and the collection of evidence necessary to identify crash causes, charge violations of Massachusetts laws, and prepare for a successful prosecution, if appropriate.

- C. *Crash Reporting*: The gathering of appropriate data and other information necessary to complete required reports.

IV. PROCEDURES

A. 61.2.1 (M) Crash Scene Reporting and Investigation

1. Initial Response

- a. The first responding officers at the scene of a traffic collision should provide for:
- (1) medical attention to the needs of victims including first aid and a request for Emergency Medical Services;
 - (2) alerting dispatch regarding any hazardous materials and the need for the Cambridge Fire Department and Department of Public Works to respond;
 - (3) the safety of bystanders and the rerouting of oncoming traffic;
 - (4) alerting dispatch of the need for a tow truck;
 - (5) advising a patrol supervisor of serious injuries or death;
 - (6) security of the property of victims if necessary;
 - (7) calling for the collision reconstruction team if required; and
 - (8) taking photos when appropriate.
- b. If fault is determined, a criminal or civil written citation should be issued, when appropriate.

2. Initial Investigation

- a. Officers conducting the initial on-scene investigation shall:
- (1) interview drivers, passengers, and witnesses;
 - (2) collect personal information including driver's license information, contact information, and ages;
 - (3) collect vehicle information;
 - (4) take detailed notes including time, date, and location, roadway conditions at the time, traffic control signs, obstructions in the roadway, and injuries to victims;
 - (5) record/collect short-lived evidence for the follow-up investigation; and
 - (6) restore the normal flow of traffic.
3. Officers are required to complete a Motor Vehicle Collision Report for one or more of the following incidents or circumstances.

- a. Where the damage to any one vehicle exceeds \$1,000 or there is an injury to any person.
 - b. Whenever the parties involved in the crash are insistent that a police report be completed.
 - c. Whenever the collision involves a pedestrian or bicyclist (regardless of whether there are any injuries);
 - d. Whenever the vehicle must be towed from the scene as result of the collision or for evidentiary purposes.
 - e. Whenever in the judgment of the officer and/or their supervisor, it is deemed prudent to do so.
4. Suspension of Investigation
- a. Generally, the responding officer will conduct the initial investigation of the crash scene and determine if the exchange of information by the operators is sufficient or if a supervisor should be notified when the crash appears serious.
 - (1) The supervisor will determine what additional resources are needed and, if the crash involves a serious injury or fatality, will make appropriate notifications, such as to the Office of the District Attorney and/or the MSP Collision Analysis and Reconstruction Section (CARS).
 - (2) In these cases, the District Attorney's Office or the Massachusetts State Police will coordinate and lead the investigation.
 - b. When a reconstructionist responds to a scene, certain conditions may require the officers to suspend the investigation. Such conditions include inclement weather or poor lighting. In these cases, the investigation may be continued at a more favorable time.
 - (1) The officers will attempt to gather as much information as possible immediately after the crash but will return to the scene as soon as conditions improve and become more favorable.
5. Reporting
- a. Community members may report minor traffic collisions over the phone or by coming to the police station. These reports will be available from the Records Unit for insurance reporting and claims.
 - b. M.G.L. c. 90, § 26 requires a person who was operating a motor vehicle involved in a crash in which (i) any person was killed or (ii) injured or (iii) in which there was damage in excess of \$1,000 to any one vehicle or other property, to complete and file a Crash Operator Report with the Registrar five (5) days after such crash unless the person is physically incapable of doing so due to incapacitation.
 - (1) The person completing the report must also send a copy of the report to the police department having jurisdiction on the roadway where the crash occurred. If the operator is incapacitated but is not the vehicle's owner, the owner is required to file

the crash report within 5 days based on his/her knowledge and information obtained about the crash. Massachusetts also requires operators to submit a copy of the report to their insurance companies and to the Registry of Motor Vehicles.

- (2) The Registrar may require the owner or operator to supplement the report and can revoke or suspend the license of any person violating any provision of this legal requirement. A police department is required to accept a report filed by an owner or operator whose vehicle has been damaged in a crash in which another person unlawfully left the scene, even if damage to the vehicle does not exceed \$1,000.

6. Follow-up Investigation

- a. The department crash investigation unit is responsible for follow-up on all collisions other than those minor collisions that only require a report for insurance purposes. The follow-up investigation may include:
 - (1) collecting data to help analysts and traffic engineers plan for development and improvement;
 - (2) obtaining/recording formal statements from witnesses;
 - (3) reconstructing collisions/crashes using expert and technical assistance;
 - (4) preparing formal reports to support criminal charges; and
 - (5) gathering additional data about driver, pedestrian, bicyclist, vehicle, roadway controls, or related collision/crash information for use by a department data analyst.

7. Crashes on private property are no different from any other crash for investigative or reporting purposes.

B. 61.2.2 (M) Collision/Crash Scene Duties

1. Collision/crash scene responsibilities for responding law enforcement personnel include the following.
 - a. Determining who is in charge at the scene.
 - (1) For a minor traffic collision, the responding officer is in charge of the scene.
 - (2) For more serious collisions, the officer shall notify a supervisor who will determine if any additional resources are required and will be deployed to assist with the investigation; or for serious injury or fatalities, the District Attorney's office shall be notified; the DA will notify the MSP CARS team to respond.
 - b. Identifying and dealing with injured persons.
 - (1) The responding officer will immediately evaluate the scene for injuries and request EMS if required.
 - (2) All department officers are trained to a first responder level and may provide first aid prior to the arrival of EMS if needed.

- c. Identifying and dealing with fire hazards and/or hazardous materials.
 - (1) Officers will evaluate the scene for safety hazards.
 - (i) At certain crash scenes officers may have to evacuate or extricate persons from the vehicle and/or immediate area to preserve life and safety.
 - (ii) Officers should request a response from the Fire Department to mitigate dangerous conditions.
 - d. Collecting information.
 - (1) The responding officers will document and include all pertinent information to include, but not limited to, the involved vehicle license plate numbers, make/model of involved vehicles, status of registration and insurance of involved vehicles, involved operator driver's license information and biographical information, a current contact number and/or e-mail address, involved passenger biographical information, the status of any person(s) injured, the suspected mechanism of the crash, and location of where vehicles are towed (if applicable) in a police report if one is required; the officers may provide information verbally to the officer responsible for completing an incident report or to the reconstructionist if necessary.
- 2. Protecting the collision/crash scene.
 - a. Officers may protect a collision/crash scene by using their cruiser or motorcycle as a physical barrier with emergency lights activated, using crime scene tape to block off the affected area, and using physical barriers (such as cones or traffic barrels) to prevent access to the scene.
 - b. Certain crash scenes may require the preservation of evidence; a crash scene log shall be established for the proper documentation of the crash scene.
 - 3. Controlling property belonging to collision/crash victims.
 - a. Personal items belonging to the occupants of the involved vehicles may be found in the vehicles or in the immediate area of the crash scene. Depending on the circumstances, officers should return items to the occupants unless the property is seized and placed in the Evidence Room as evidence or for safekeeping.
 - b. Such items should be returned to the rightful owners in an appropriate manner. If property is maintained as evidence, the property will be handled according to department policy.
 - c. Officers should document the return of property in the incident report and shall fill out appropriate documentation for evidence or safekeeping.
 - 4. Duties/responsibilities of first arriving officer on scene.

- a. In addition to the duties described above, officers may need to remove debris from the roadway and set up cones or barriers to redirect traffic. Officers may also need to notify additional city or state agencies regarding the extended shutdown of a roadway.
- b. In the case of an extended roadway shutdown, the Shift Commander and Command Staff should be notified so that proper notifications can be shared with the public.