

1.03 Vehicular Pursuits



VEHICULAR PURSUITS

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I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS AND GUIDELINES

Vehicular pursuits are necessary to effectuate the enforcement of criminal and motor vehicle laws. Many of these pursuits are inherently dangerous and, therefore, create some risk of injury to the pursuing officer(s), the occupant(s) of the pursued vehicle, and the public at large.

The primary purpose of this policy is to secure a balance between the need to protect the lives of the public and the occupants of the pursued vehicle, and the obligation of police officers to enforce laws and apprehend violators. This policy also recognizes that vehicular pursuits do not automatically occur when officers activate their emergency warning equipment in an attempt to effectuate a lawful motor vehicle stop or when following and observing a motor vehicle.¹ Motorists occasionally may not immediately see or hear an officer's emergency warning equipment, or may not realize that they are the target of an officer's efforts. Officers may be required to follow a motorist with emergency warning equipment activated for a significant distance before that motorist actually stops the vehicle.

Consequently, an officer's lawful attempt to stop a motorist is not considered a vehicular pursuit subject to the requirements and restrictions of this policy unless and until such time as the officer reasonably believes (i.e., has "reasonable suspicion") that the motorist is intentionally ignoring the officer or actively attempting to elude the officer. (Keep in mind that,

1.03 Vehicular Pursuits

under the Massachusetts Constitution, a pursuit constitutes a “seizure” and must be justified by reasonable suspicion. This state’s courts have ruled that as soon as an officer activates a cruiser’s blue lights or siren, the seizure has occurred.) Events subsequent to police pursuit, including efforts to elude or flee from the police, cannot be used to supply the requisite reasonable suspicion to justify a prior investigatory stop.²

Pursuing officers and supervisory personnel must weigh the risk of a pursuit against the necessity to apprehend a vehicle’s occupant. In determining whether or not to pursue, officers and supervisors must consider many factors.

A practice of prohibiting all pursuits would encourage operators so inclined to simply not stop when signaled to do so. Allowing pursuits under all circumstances would unnecessarily put people at risk.

Since numerous unique situations arise in law enforcement, it is impossible for this policy to anticipate all possible vehicular pursuit circumstances. Therefore, in unusual situations, an officer should use common sense and consult with a supervisor whenever possible.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of this department that a vehicular pursuit is authorized when the need to apprehend a suspect fleeing in a motor vehicle outweighs the risk created by the pursuit.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. *Authorized Police Vehicle*: A police department motor vehicle equipped with operable audible and visual emergency warning equipment.
- B. *Primary Unit*: An authorized police vehicle that is the first vehicle behind the pursued vehicle.
- C. *Secondary Unit*: An authorized police vehicle that is actively involved in the pursuit behind the primary unit as backup.
- D. *Supervisor*: The officer-in-charge or other person-in-charge.
- E. *Vehicular Pursuit*: An active attempt by an officer in an authorized police vehicle to apprehend a fleeing suspect who is actively attempting to elude the officer. For the purposes of this policy, an officer’s following or attempting to catch up to a vehicle, the driver of which does not appear to be attempting to elude the officer, is not a pursuit.
- F. *Densely Populated Area*: An established area of a city or town that is thickly settled and/or composed of a business district marked by compactness, with pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

IV. PROCEDURE

A. Prohibited

1. No officer shall continue a pursuit after having been directed to discontinue the pursuit by a supervisor.
2. No officer shall continue a pursuit after having lost radio communications with the dispatcher.
3. No officer shall initiate or continue a pursuit on a divided highway in the opposite direction of the flow of vehicular traffic.
4. Unless authorized by a supervisor, no officer (other than the officers in the primary and secondary units) shall engage in the main pursuit or pursue on parallel streets.
5. No officer shall participate in a pursuit with a civilian present in the authorized police vehicle.
6. No officer shall participate in a pursuit of a motorcycle for minor traffic violations if the officer knows the motorcycle's registration number or the identity of the operator.
7. Vehicles other than authorized police vehicles may NOT participate in any pursuit.
8. No officer operating a motorcycle will participate in a vehicular pursuit.

B. Evaluating the Circumstances [41.2.2(a)]

1. TARGET VEHICLE FACTORS

Officers shall consider the following in deciding whether to initiate or continue a vehicle pursuit:

- a. Does the continued operation of the vehicle the officer intends to stop pose a risk of physical harm to the officer, the public, or others?
- b. Do the occupant(s) of the vehicle the officer intends to stop pose a risk of physical harm to the public or others?
- c. Are the occupant(s) of the vehicle wanted for the commission of felonious acts that threaten, have threatened, or will threaten the health, life, or safety of a person or persons?
- d. Is the operator or wanted passenger known to the police, and is later apprehension possible?
- e. Are other persons in the pursued vehicle?
- f. What are the driving skills of the operator of the vehicle being pursued?

1.03 Vehicular Pursuits

2. ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS: Officers shall consider the following in deciding whether to initiate or continue a vehicle pursuit:
 - a. Population density (including volume of pedestrian traffic);
 - b. Nature of the area (residential, commercial, school zone, and the volume type, speed and direction of vehicular traffic);
 - c. Officer's familiarity with the area;
 - d. Road and weather conditions;
 - e. Time of day;
 - f. Speeds involved;
 - g. Driving skills of the officer and the performance capabilities of the pursuit vehicle and the vehicle being pursued;
 - h. Operational status of emergency warning equipment; and
 - i. Quality of radio communications.

C. Pursuit Operations

1. GENERALLY

- a. When engaged in a pursuit, officers shall exercise due care for the safety of the public and shall comply with all of the provisions of M.G.L. c. 89, §7B (Operation of Emergency Vehicles), as follows:
 - 1) The driver of any police department vehicle shall be subject to the provisions of any statute, rule, regulation, ordinance or bylaw relating to the operation or parking of vehicles, including stopping for a school bus with red lights flashing which has stopped to allow passengers to alight or board, except:
 - a) The driver may exceed the speed limit if [s]he exercises caution and due regard under the circumstances for the safety of persons and property; and
 - b) The driver may drive through an intersection contrary to traffic signs or signals if [s]he first brings the vehicle to a full stop and then proceeds with caution and due regard for the safety of persons and property.
 - 2) Upon engaging in a pursuit, the primary unit and, if involved, secondary unit shall activate emergency warning equipment.
- b. No officer will drive with reckless disregard for the safety of other road users.

2. POLICE VEHICLES **[41.2.2(d)]**

- a. Officers operating a marked police vehicles may initiate a pursuit.

1.03 Vehicular Pursuits

- b. Officers operating an unmarked police vehicle must relinquish the pursuit to marked vehicles when such marked vehicles join the pursuit.
 - c. Officers operating a specialty vehicle must relinquish the pursuit to marked vehicles when such marked vehicles join the pursuit.
 - d. No officer operating a police motorcycle will participate in a vehicular pursuit.
 - e. Officers shall not participate in a motor vehicle pursuit in their personally owned vehicles unless authorized to do so by the Shift Supervisor or OIC. **[41.2.2(d)]**
3. INITIATING OFFICER'S RESPONSIBILITIES **[41.2.2(b)]**
- a. The officer who initiates the pursuit and becomes the first police vehicle behind the vehicle being pursued is the primary unit.
 - b. The primary unit shall notify the dispatcher of the pursuit, including:
 - 1) The location where the pursuit was initiated;
 - 2) The direction of the fleeing vehicle;
 - 3) The description of the pursued vehicle and registration number, if known;
 - 4) The reason for the pursuit; and
 - 5) The estimated speeds of the vehicles.
 - c. The primary officer shall keep the dispatcher updated on the pursuit at regular intervals until relieved of this duty by the secondary officer.
 - d. Subject to the direction of a supervisor, the officer operating the primary unit is vested with the authority to decide and direct the pursuit actions.
 - e. The officer operating the primary unit shall continually re-evaluate and assess the pursuit. The officer shall terminate the pursuit, even in the absence of an order to terminate by a supervisor, when that officer reasonably believes that the foreseeable risks to the officer, the public or others arising from a continued pursuit are greater than the threat to public safety, should the pursued vehicle be allowed to escape.
 - f. The pursuing officer shall notify the dispatcher or communications center when it is likely that a pursuit will continue into a neighboring jurisdiction.

1.03 Vehicular Pursuits

4. SECONDARY UNIT RESPONSIBILITIES [41.2.2(c)]

- a. The secondary unit shall maintain a safe distance behind the primary unit, but should remain close enough to provide assistance if required.
- b. The secondary unit shall assume radio communications, allowing the primary unit to concentrate on driving.

D. Dispatcher Responsibilities [41.2.2(e)]

1. Upon being informed of a pursuit in progress, the dispatcher shall:
 - a. Immediately notify the supervisor or officer-in-charge;
 - b. Receive and record all incoming information on the pursued vehicle;
 - c. Advise all other units that a pursuit is in progress, providing all relevant information;
 - d. Perform relevant record and motor vehicle checks as expeditiously as possible;
 - e. Coordinate assistance of other officers under the direction of the supervisor;
 - f. Notify affected law enforcement agencies over appropriate communications systems, and seek their assistance if the pursuit is proceeding into another jurisdiction;
 - g. Notify all affected agencies when a pursuit has been terminated or if apprehension has been made.
2. The dispatcher shall minimize radio traffic to allow the pursuing vehicles to communicate.

E. Supervisor Responsibilities [41.2.2(f)]

1. Upon becoming aware of a pursuit, the supervisor shall evaluate the totality of the circumstances pursuant to this policy and determine whether the pursuit should continue.
2. If the supervisor determines that a pursuit should continue, [s]he shall continuously re-evaluate the need for continuing the pursuit.
3. The supervisor shall coordinate activities as needed to ensure that proper procedures are followed.
4. A supervisor may authorize officers in addition to the primary and secondary units to engage in the pursuit and/or a parallel pursuit in exceptional circumstances, or if the supervisor reasonably believes that there is a substantial likelihood of serious physical injury or death should additional officers not participate.

1.03 Vehicular Pursuits

5. The supervisor may terminate the pursuit at any time and shall terminate the pursuit if [s]he believes that the foreseeable risks to the pursuing officers and to the public, arising from the continued pursuit, are greater than the foreseeable threat to public safety should the pursued vehicle be allowed to escape.
6. The supervisor may authorize the resumption of a pursuit when [s]he believes that circumstances have changed, thereby warranting the resumption of the pursuit in accordance with the criteria of this policy.
7. When it is feasible and when authorized, a supervisor should respond to the location where a vehicle has been stopped following a pursuit.

F. Inter-Jurisdictional Pursuits [41.2.2(h)]

1. PURSUITS INITIATED BY THIS DEPARTMENT

- a. Pursuit initiated by members of this department may continue into another jurisdiction when done in conformance with applicable Massachusetts General Laws, department policies, and inter-jurisdictional agreements.

- 1) Outside the Commonwealth: On fresh and continued pursuit, a police officer may pursue a person who has committed a felony into any neighboring state and arrest that person.³
- 2) Within the Commonwealth: A police officer may make an arrest outside his/her jurisdiction on fresh and continued pursuit provided:
 - a) The offense is one for which the officer would have the right of arrest without a warrant within his/her jurisdiction;
 - b) The offense was committed in the officer's presence; and
 - c) The offense was committed within the officer's jurisdiction.⁴

NOTE: If this department has a Mutual Aid Agreement with another municipality, such agreement may address situations under which officers from one department may pursue motorists into the other community; if so, the terms of the agreement may grant additional rights beyond those in the state's "fresh and continued pursuit" statute.

- b. Requests for Assistance: When this department has initiated a pursuit, timely notification of a pursuit in progress shall be provided to any other jurisdiction into which the pursuit enters.
 - 1) Merely notifying another jurisdiction that a pursuit is in progress is not a request to join the pursuit. The department shall advise if assistance is necessary.

1.03 Vehicular Pursuits

- 2) Whenever the pursuing officers are unfamiliar with the roadways and terrain of the jurisdiction into which the pursuit has entered, or whenever radio communication is lost, the pursuing officers shall, when possible, seek the assistance of, and be prepared to relinquish the pursuit to, the other agency.

2. PURSUITS INITIATED BY OTHER DEPARTMENTS: **[41.2.2(h)]**
INTRA-JURISDICTIONAL (multi-jurisdictional pursuits involving department personnel in the department's jurisdiction. This would include pursuits initiated in the department's jurisdiction initiated by another agency. (e.g. having concurrent jurisdiction) as well as any pursuits initiated outside the department's jurisdiction and entering into the department's jurisdiction.): Officers shall not become involved in another agency's pursuit without notifying and specifically receiving authorization from their supervisor.

G. Termination of a Pursuit [41.2.2(g)]

1. TERMINATION:
 - a. A pursuit shall be terminated if the foreseeable risks to the pursuing officers and to the public arising from the continued pursuit are greater than the foreseeable threat to public safety should the pursued vehicle be allowed to escape.
 - b. When a decision is made to terminate a pursuit, the primary and secondary units shall immediately reduce their speeds to within the posted speed limits and shall deactivate their emergency warning equipment.
 - c. It is recognized that, upon terminating a pursuit, the pursuing units are not required to bring their vehicles to a stop and/or head in the opposite direction of the former target vehicle. The primary and secondary units may continue to operate their vehicles in the same direction as the previously pursued vehicle, so long as they maintain a safe distance, and their actions do not constitute an active attempt to continue the pursuit.
2. RESUMPTION OF A TERMINATED PURSUIT: Once a pursuit has been terminated, the primary, secondary, and other units aware of the pursuit may not re-engage the pursuit without authorization from a supervisor.

H. After-Action Reporting

1. WRITTEN REPORT **[41.2.2(i)]**
 - a. Whenever an officer engages in a pursuit, [s]he shall file a written report detailing the circumstances.

1.03 Vehicular Pursuits

b. The supervisor shall file the appropriate report as well.

2. ADMINISTRATOR REVIEW

a. After action reports shall be evaluated by a superior officer not personally involved in the pursuit to determine if there has been compliance with departmental policies and regulations. **[41.2.2(i)]**

b. Annual Analysis: The Sergeant shall be responsible for conducting and documenting an annually analysis of pursuit activities. The purpose of the analysis may reveal patterns or trends that indicate training needs and/or policy modifications. The analysis shall be forwarded to the Chief for review. Such reviews may include:

[41.2.3] [41.2.2(j)]

- 1) Number of pursuits;
- 2) Date and time (shift);
- 3) Original offense;
- 4) Reason for terminating the pursuit;
- 5) Whether spike strips were used;
- 6) Injuries;
- 7) Property damage;
- 8) Whether emergency lights and siren were used;
- 9) Whether a supervisor took control of the pursuit;
- 10) Supervisor: years on the job;
- 11) Primary Officer: years on the job;
- 12) Average length and distance of the pursuit;
- 13) Whether the pursuit left this agency's jurisdiction;
- 14) Suspect information;
- 15) Whether the pursuit appeared to comply with agency policy;
and,
- 16) Training issues identified.

I. Intervention Techniques

1. TRAINING

Intervention Techniques are prohibited unless they have been trained on and have been authorized by the shift supervisor/officer in charge.

[41.2.3(c)]

1.03 Vehicular Pursuits

2. TIRE DEFLATION DEVICES:

- a. Circumstances warranting use: Tire deflation devices should be used, when practicable, where there is an agreement between the primary unit and the officer who will deploy the device. **[41.2.3(a)]**
- b. Procedures for Implementation: The officer deploying the tire deflation device shall only do so when that officer has been trained in its use and believes that the device can be deployed safely. **[41.2.3(b)]**
- c. Tire deflation devices shall not be deployed to stop motorcycles, vehicles carrying hazardous materials, or vehicles for hire that may be carrying passengers.
- d. Supervisory responsibilities: Officers shall request and receive authorization from a supervisor and/or OIC prior to deploying forcible stopping technique(s) or road spikes. **[41.2.3(d)]**

3. BOXING-IN

- a. Boxing-in is an active attempt to terminate a pursuit by surrounding the pursued vehicle with the primary, secondary, or other units which are then slowed to a stop.
- b. West Brookfield Police Department personnel are **prohibited** from “Boxing In” pursued motor vehicles.

4. HEADING OFF

- a. Heading off is an active attempt to terminate a pursuit by the primary unit pulling ahead of the pursued vehicle in a manner to force the pursued vehicle to come to a stop or risk collision with the primary unit.
- b. West Brookfield Police Department personnel are **prohibited** from “Heading Off” pursued motor vehicles.

5. ROADBLOCKS

- a. Roadblocks are an active attempt to terminate a pursuit through the use of a restriction or obstruction in the roadway that is intended to stop the passage of motor vehicles on a roadway
- b. West Brookfield Police Department personnel are **prohibited** from using a “Roadblock” tactic on a pursued motor vehicle. **[41.2.3(a)]**

6. FORCIBLE STOPPING:

- a. Forcible stopping is an active attempt by the primary unit and /or other pursuit vehicles to terminate a pursuit through the use of deliberate contact between the moving police vehicle(s) and the moving pursued vehicle. Deliberate contact between a police vehicle and a pursued vehicle is **prohibited**. **[41.2.3(a)]**

1.03 Vehicular Pursuits

7. USE OF FIREARMS:

- a. Discharging a firearm at a moving vehicle by an officer is prohibited, except to defend said officer or another when the occupant of the pursued vehicle is employing deadly force which the officer reasonably perceives as an imminent threat of death or physical injury, and the officer reasonably believes that [s]he will not endanger innocent persons.
- b. Shooting at a fleeing vehicle or a vehicle that is going away from the officer and is no longer an immediate threat is prohibited. Under such circumstances, officers should be aware of the potential inability of a bullet to penetrate metal or glass surfaces of an automobile and the likelihood of ricocheting bullets causing injury to innocent persons.

J. WRITTEN REPORT

Officers who engage in a motor vehicle pursuit or uses forcible stopping technique(s) shall file a written report to the Sergeant detailing the circumstances of the pursuit/forcible stopping technique(s) prior to the end of their tour of duty unless authorized by the Chief of Police or his designee.

The Chief or his designee not personally involved in the pursuit shall conduct an Administrative Review of the report(s). The Administrative Review is to determine if there has been compliance with departmental policies and procedures and if there is a need for any additional training and/or policy modifications. **[41.2.3(e)]**.

AMMENDMENTS:

¹ *Commonwealth v. Starr*, 55 Mass. App. Ct. 590, 773 N.E.2d 981 (2002).

² *Commonwealth v. DaSilva*, 56 Mass. Ct. App. Ct. 220, 775 NE2d 1269 (2002).

³ M.G.L. c. 276, §10A.

⁴ M.G.L. c. 41, §98A.