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**Section: 3.1                      Apparatus & Vehicle Operation**

Effective Date:            08/24/2011

Revision Date:            07/29/1029

Approved by: M. Erickson – Asst. Chief

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**SCOPE:**

This guideline applies to all South Metro Fire Department personnel who are responsible for operating fire department vehicles.

**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this guideline is to promote safe apparatus & vehicle operations.

**GENERAL:**

**Driver/operator's responsibility:** It is the responsibility of the driver of each fire department vehicle to drive safely and prudently at all times. The driver of the emergency vehicle is responsible for its safe operation at all times.

**Officer's responsibility:** The officer in charge of the vehicle is responsible for the safety of all vehicle operations and managing compliance of this procedure.

**Compliance with traffic laws:** Vehicles shall be operated in compliance with the Minnesota Motor Vehicle Code. This code provides specific legal exceptions to regular traffic regulations which apply to fire department vehicles only when responding to an emergency incident or when transporting a patient to a medical facility. Emergency response (Code 3) does not absolve the driver of any responsibility to drive with due caution.

**A. DRIVING**

While Fire Apparatus are classed by the State of Minnesota Vehicle and Traffic Law as "authorized emergency vehicles" and such are exempt from speed, red light, turning and one-way regulations while responding to an emergency call and using audible and visual signals, they must be operated in a safe manner. For the safety of crews, patients and the public, SMFD vehicles will be operated as follows:

1. Speed - Vehicles shall not be operated at speeds in excess of 10 mph over the posted speed limit. However, the operator shall not exceed the speed limit, regardless of the posted limit, if it is unsafe for a particular driving condition and only in a Code 3 response.
2. Red Lights - On emergency calls, SMFD vehicles may proceed through a red light only after stopping and then proceeding at 5 mph. Use extreme caution through the intersection with siren and red lights operating. Also see policy under "Intersections".
3. Stop Signs - On emergency calls, SMFD vehicles may proceed through a stop sign only after slowing, verifying the intersection is clear, and then only proceed with caution.
4. One-Way Streets and U-Turns - Proceeding the wrong way on a one-way street shall only be done with extreme caution and only when necessary and with control. U-turns shall be made only when necessary and at a slow rate of speed and with extreme caution. Siren and red lights will be used in conjunction with the above procedures.
5. Seatbelts - All vehicles are equipped with seat belts and all persons riding in SMFD vehicles are to use the belts for their protection. Family and/or individuals riding to the hospital with a patient must use seatbelts provided. Personnel in the patient compartment will always wear seatbelts except when the seatbelt interferes with patient care procedures.
6. Restraint Systems for Patient Transport - Each stretcher is to be equipped with three straps (Leg, waist and shoulder). All patients will have all the straps firmly in place to prevent injuries. All stretchers will be secured during transport by the stretcher restraint system.
7. Regard for Safety - These provisions shall not relieve the driver of an authorized emergency vehicle from the duty to drive with due regard for the safety of all persons, nor shall these provisions protect the driver from the consequences of his/her reckless disregard for safety.
8. Passing - Passing on the right is hazardous and should be done with extreme caution. The first choice exercised by the driver shall be to pass on the left. If traffic will not allow, as is often the case on multi-lane one-way roads, the

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SMFD vehicle may proceed around traffic on the right at a slow, safe rate of speed. Do not pass other emergency vehicles on emergency runs particularly those of other agencies unless directed to do so by that agency's driver. This should only occur when the vehicle being followed is having difficulty and safe passage around is granted by the first vehicle. This is to be considered a rare and extraordinary occurrence.

**B. VEHICLE OPERATIONS AND CARE**

All SMFD personnel have joint and individual responsibilities in the operation and care of vehicles within the SMFD fleet. Only properly assigned drivers will drive a SMFD vehicle.

**SMFD vehicles will be operated as provided by law** and in no way should ever jeopardize lives or the safety of your passengers or public. SMFD vehicles will not be used to conduct any private business or transport.

## 1. Response Codes:

- a. **Routine Responses** - This category of response refers to emergent response, without red lights or siren. Drivers must observe all traffic regulations.
- b. **Code Three Responses** - This category refers to emergency responses where there is a high probability of death, serious injury or illness, and where the possibility that immediate action by emergency personnel may reduce the severity of the injury and/or illness as determined by medical dispatch protocols. While on a code three response, emergency-warning devices will be used continuously to alert other vehicles of the presence of an emergency vehicle and will not be used to demand the right-of-way.

Vehicles will not exceed 10 mph above the posted speed limit under safe conditions. Speeds should be reduced to account for hazards such as pedestrians, traffic, and weather conditions. Units should come to a complete stop at all red lights; and when given the exclusive right-of-way at an intersection, may proceed one lane at a time, with extreme caution, at a speed of no more than 5 mph. Vehicles will ONLY proceed through a stop sign with absolute control of the intersection and no greater than 5mph.

Generally, emergency units should drive in the left-most available lane for traffic moving in the same direction. Passing on the right can be dangerous as yielding traffic usually moves to the right. When driving through school zones, during posted hours or when warning lights are flashing, the posted speed limit should be obeyed while making sure that all children are at a safe distance. When approaching a school bus that is flashing red lights, the emergency unit should come to a complete stop and turn off the siren until the bus driver gives the unit permission to proceed around the bus.

Emergency units should not attempt to force uncooperative or inattentive drivers to yield by tailgating, swerving, shouting over the PA system, or manipulating the emergency vehicle in any other unsafe manner.

Emergency units should be aware of the appropriate use of the siren in or around a hospital zone; however, the siren should be activated well in advance of intersections in or around a hospital zone. Emergency vehicles must not pass a school bus displaying its stop sign until the driver of the school bus has withdrawn the stop sign.

2. **Responding when out of quarters:** All apparatus responding to emergency calls from a location other than their assigned station shall acknowledge the alarm and state the location from which response is being made.
3. **Residential Streets:** Residential streets shall be avoided when possible.

**C. VEHICLE OPERATION REQUIREMENTS**

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1. Smoking and tobacco products shall not be used by anyone inside the Vehicle at any time.
2. Vehicles should be driven with headlights on at all times for safety.
3. The AM/FM radio system in the ambulance is not to be on when a patient is present or being transported in the ambulance or while operating on emergency.
4. SMFD personnel shall wear seatbelts when riding in the cab area.
5. Sit-up patients and all passengers shall be required to wear seat belts whenever they are present in the ambulance regardless of whether they are in the patient or cab area.
6. Young children and infants who are not patients should be transported in a child restraint seat whenever possible.
7. Whenever a vehicle is left running and not occupied with a driver, the emergency brake shall be applied.
8. Vehicles utilized on duty shifts shall be refueled when the tank is at or above one-half full. Vehicles parked in reserve or out-of-service status shall be fully fueled before being parked.
9. Vehicles will not leave road surfaces for the purpose of being driven on frozen bodies of water such as lakes, rivers, or streams.
10. Vehicles may be taken off improved roadways or parking lot surfaces in a medical emergency in order to gain access to a patient or patients, provided it can be reasonably ascertained that the vehicle will not be damaged or stuck in soft or impassable terrain. In those instances where personnel feel it may not be prudent to leave a roadway surface, a specialized rescue vehicle (i.e. four-wheel drive, ATV, snowmobile, etc.) should be summoned to assist in gaining access to the patient.
11. Vehicles shall not utilize drive-thru lanes of any type at such places like fast food restaurants, banks, post offices, etc. without FULL consideration of vehicle dimensions.
12. Vehicles will not be driven under canopies, garages, or other coverings without a spotter to ensure proper clearance of the unit. The use of a spotter is not necessary in the case where it is known that vehicles have previously been in specific garage areas or under canopies such as hospital garages and health care facility canopies.
13. EQUIPMENT WITHIN PASSENGER COMPARTMENT: All equipment transported within the passenger compartment of a department vehicle should be secured against sudden movement or stored within an approved enclosure.
14. SCBA STORAGE: Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) carried within the apparatus shall be properly positioned within approved holders.
15. Personnel will always conduct themselves in a professional manner . The following shall be maintained:
  - a. Feet shall be kept off the dashboard/console area
  - b. No shouting at other vehicles or people
  - c. Driving in a professional manner
  - d. Keep feet out of the door well area

**D. VEHICLE SPEED**

1. SMFD personnel should drive in the emergency mode only as may be required per the call situation. Always give due regard to the safety of the patient, passengers, and public as required under the law. Emergency mode driving is intended to help provide a clear path for the vehicle. It is not to be regarded as a license to violate traffic laws and be discourteous to other drivers.
2. Except in an emergency, all employees driving SMFD vehicles will drive in the right-hand lane (where possible) and drive no faster than the posted limit. If circumstances such as weather, visibility, vehicle condition, etc. so require, vehicle speed will be reduced to a level consistent with the prevailing circumstances.
3. It is the policy of SMFD that any vehicle engaged in emergency (code 3) operations shall not drive faster than 10 m.p.h. above the posted speed limit, as circumstances may dictate.
4. All emergency lights must be activated when on an emergency response or transport.
5. The siren must be activated when on an emergency response or transport.
6. When operating under "Code-3" operation, the driver shall maintain a safe following distance between their vehicle and any other emergency vehicle that may be proceeding in the same direction or to the same call.

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7. When approaching a “red” semaphore light, the vehicle shall come to a complete stop or be able to make a complete stop before proceeding through the intersection. When approaching a stop sign, only proceed with absolute control and no faster than 5MPH.
8. All vehicles being driven in an emergency mode shall stop for a school bus when it has the stop arm extended and/or red lights flashing. Emergency vehicles may pass the school bus only when the bus’s stop arm and lights have been deactivated, or the bus driver has waved for the emergency vehicle to pass.
9. All ambulances being driven in an emergency mode shall stop at all railroad crossings where the signal lights and/or stop arm is down. After stopping, if no train is present, the ambulance may proceed if it is safe to do so.
10. All Minnesota State laws governing emergency vehicles and the operation of same shall be adopted as a part of this policy.

**E. OPERATION OF “OPTICOM”**

1. The purpose for using the Opticom Traffic Signal Pre-emption System (TSPS) is to allow emergency vehicles to perform emergency services in a safer and more timely manner by temporarily controlling vehicle traffic flow at signalized intersections.
2. Opticom is only authorized for use on “Code-3” emergency calls.
3. Drivers may elect to turn off emitters in poor weather conditions such as heavy snow, rain, or fog.
4. Drivers may elect to use discretion on the operation of emitters to allow other emergency vehicles to control access of intersections for their response.
5. Emergency personnel must be aware that the TSPS may fail to operate at signalized intersections due to the following:
  - a. The intersection may not be TSPS equipped.
  - b. One or more TSPS components may be inoperative.
  - c. The speed of the emergency vehicle may cause the emergency vehicle to arrive at the intersection too soon for the TSPS to cycle the signal to green.
  - d. Another emergency vehicle using TSPS may be coming from a cross flow direction and may have already seized command of the intersection signal.
  - e. Severe weather conditions may disrupt the detection of the emitted signal.
  - f. Other conditions may exist which prevent the TSPS from operating as designed.
6. Emitters shall always be turned off after arrival at the emergency scene to avoid TSPS-controlled intersections from being locked on green from an active emitter. *NOTE:* The Opticom emitter in most cases has been set up to shut off automatically when the unit is placed in park. If this does not occur, there may be a malfunction in the system.
7. Any malfunction in TSPS controlled intersections shall be reported immediately to the appropriate shift officer who will report to MnDOT. Drivers should warn other emergency vehicles who may be accessing the same intersections of any malfunctions.

**F. ROAD EMERGENCY / VEHICLE PROBLEMS**

1. In order to ensure the safety and well being of the patient, passengers, and crew in the event of a road emergency or vehicle break down, the vehicle operator shall immediately initiate certain action steps to include:
2. If an on-board patient is deemed critical/urgent, and the ambulance should experience a mechanical or other road emergency that prevents the operation of the unit, notify dispatch immediately to send an alternate ambulance and/or police and fire as required.
3. Safely pull over to the shoulder as far as possible. If you are unable to pull over to a safe location, call dispatch and request immediate assistance from the State Patrol or local law enforcement.
4. If an engine mechanical issue requires, shut the vehicle off.
5. Set the parking brake.
6. Turn on 4-way flashers and carefully set up hazard triangles behind the vehicle (as safe to do so).

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7. Ensure patient and passenger safety as a number one priority. This may include:
8. Evacuation of the vehicle if smoke, fire or other hazard exists.
9. Notify and stay in contact with dispatch by cellular telephone or radio to update scene status and changes as may be required.
10. Explain the situation to the patient and passengers and ensure their comfort and well being. As appropriate, offer to make telephone notifications or allow them the use of the department cell phone to talk with family.

**G. CELLULAR PHONE USAGE**

1. It is the policy of the SMFD to provide a safe and healthy work environment for its employees and patients. This policy is intended to control the manner and means under which any employee may utilize a cellular telephone for a telephonic conversation, whether such telephone is issued by SMFD or personally owned by the employee, during the time period when the employee is authorized and required to operate a SMFD vehicle in order to perform work activities.
2. No employee is authorized to use the cellular telephone for a telephonic conversation, whether such telephone is issued by SMFD or personally owned, while the employee is in the process of operating the motor vehicle while it is moving or temporarily stopped or otherwise in an active vehicular traffic lane on a public or privately owned road, highway or alley or on privately owned property. The only exception is administrative vehicles provided in accordance with State Statute.
3. If it is necessary to use a SMFD issued or privately-owned cellular telephone for a telephonic conversation for SMFD business, it is only allowed for SMFD business AND in full accordance with State Statute.
4. At no time shall an operator use a cell phone while operating as an emergency vehicle UNLESS, it is urgent and related to life safety and there is only one operator. It is only done in accordance with State Statute.

**H. TRANSPORTING PATIENT'S PERSONAL BELONGINGS**

1. As a courtesy, SMFD will transport a patient's personal belongings provided they can be safely stored and restrained within the ambulance. All personal property is to be left with the patient or caregiver at the point of destination in a hospital patient belongings bag.
2. It is the policy of SMFD to not transport any cash, jewelry, or valuables not in the patient's possession at the time of the call (extra valuables from around the house, etc.).
3. Every attempt should be made to leave valuables and non-essential personal belongings with family members. Upon arrival at the point of destination, the patient's belongings should be released to the receiving RN or family members.
4. In order to document the chain of custody, the narrative section of the PCR should reflect the items transferred and the name of the individual who received them. If valuables such as cash or jewelry are transported, the crew would request that the receiving party affix their signature next to the notation on the PCR.

**I. VEHICLE CHECKLISTS**

At shift change, the driver and officer shall check their assigned vehicle and the ambulances complete the vehicle/log/checklist sheet. At the beginning of each shift both ambulance driver and officer will complete the checklist indicating that the ambulance and equipment are in good repair and operational, it is the responsibility of the driver to turn in this sheet. Engines and ladders follow the same practice although no checklist, any and all discrepancies should be noted in writing and brought to the attention of the Supervisor and shall be entered on the department Web Site. At the start of each shift, the driver of administrative vehicles will conduct a walk around of the vehicle and verify that all equipment is in place and operational. Daily paperwork is not required for administrative, engines or ladders.

1. PRE-OPERATION VEHICLE SAFETY / MAINTENANCE INSPECTION – POLICY

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- a. It shall be the responsibility of all employees who will be operating a Department vehicle to perform a safety and basic maintenance inspection of the vehicle prior to driving the unit. Including equipment.
- b. Any vehicle deemed unsafe or in need of immediate (critical vehicle system) maintenance shall be pulled from service, not driven, and referred to the supervisor and placed on the Department Web site. In accordance with department practice the vehicle will be scheduled for immediate repairs. The vehicle shall be “Red tagged’ until safe.
- c. Employees shall perform a vehicle inspection that will include the checking of such items as body damage, items as specified in the “Ambulance Daily Checklist”.
- d. Employees should further ensure that all routine and preventative vehicle maintenance is documented when time or mileage indicates.