

Oswego Town Fire Department Emergency Vehicle Operation Guidelines

PURPOSE

Responding to an emergency call, the Oswego Town Fire Department places a great deal of responsibility on the drivers of our emergency vehicles. Not only must emergency vehicle drivers provide prompt conveyance of the apparatus, equipment, and personnel to provide service to those in need, but as importantly, must accomplish this task in the safest and most prudent manner possible. Emergency vehicle drivers have at their care, custody and control of most of the major assets possessed by this organization (the vehicle, the equipment and most of all the personnel). Emergency vehicle drivers also have a standard of care to provide to the general motoring public and must make every attempt possible to provide due regard for the safety of others. Drivers must constantly monitor and reduce the amount of risk and exposure to potential losses during each and every response. Safe arrival at the emergency scene shall be, and must always remain, the first priority of all emergency vehicle drivers. In order to accomplish this enormous task all emergency vehicle drivers shall become familiar with and constantly abide by the following policies and procedures.

PROCEDURES

1. Circle of safety

Prior to entering the cab and starting the vehicle, the emergency vehicle driver shall make a circle of safety around the vehicle to see that all equipment is secured, that all compartment doors are securely closed and physical obstructions moved out of the way. During the circle of safety the emergency vehicle driver shall encircle the vehicle and visually inspect all 4 sides and the top of the vehicle before entering the cab. He/She should also verify right side and rear clearance with the person riding in the officer position. This shall be conducted prior to moving the vehicle regardless of whether or not the vehicle is about to leave on an emergency or a non-emergency.

2. Warning devices and true emergencies

When responding to a true emergency, all audible and visual warning devices will be operated at all times regardless of time of day and/or traffic conditions. All emergency vehicle drivers must understand that warning devices are not always effective in making other vehicle operators aware of your presence. Warning devices only request the right-of-way, they do not insure the right-of-way,

"The definition of a true emergency is a situation in which there is a high probability of death or serious injury to an individual or significant property loss, actions by an emergency vehicle driver may reduce the seriousness of the situation.

3. Vehicle control and right-of-way

All drivers shall attempt to maintain control of the vehicle that they are operating in such a manner as to provide the maximum level of safety for both their passengers and the general public. Emergency vehicle drivers should be aware that the civilian vehicle operators might not react in the manner that is expected or felt to be appropriate. An attempt should be made to have options available when passing or overtaking vehicles. If another vehicle operator fails to yield the right of way to an emergency vehicle, the emergency vehicle

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driver cannot force the right of way, nor can you assume the right of way, therefore you do not have the right of way until the other vehicle yields to you.

The emergency vehicle driver shall be aware of his/her rate of closure on other vehicles and pedestrians at all times to make sure that a safe following distance is established and maintained. All drivers shall follow the rule for safe following distance and allow 1 second of following distance for every 10 feet of vehicle length for speeds under 40mph and add 1 additional second for speeds over 40 mph.

4. Response speeds

When responding to a true emergency, the driver of an emergency vehicle shall operate the vehicle with due regard for the safety of all persons. The speed at which the response is made should be AT or BELOW the posted speed limit, depending on road, weather and vehicle conditions at the time of the response. Examples of conditions requiring slower response speeds include but are not limited to:

- * slippery/wet road conditions
- * inclement weather
- * poor visibility
- * heavy or congested traffic conditions
- * road/highway design or characteristics
- * vehicle design or characteristics
- * residential areas

There also may be instances where the vehicle may be operated above the posted speed limit. Operating the emergency vehicle in an emergency situation in excess of the posted speed limit should only occur when there are known life-threatening circumstances and when allowed by the state motor vehicle law. The speed should never be more than ten (10) mph over the posted speed limit up to a maximum of 65 mph. The exception should only be considered when the following are present:

- * four lane highways
- * non-congested highways with excellent visibility
- * rural roads with excellent visibility and few intersecting roads

All responses must be made with due regard for the safety of all persons.

5. Intersection practices

Extreme care should be taken when approaching any intersection as intersections are the locations responsible for a large percentage of major accidents involving emergency vehicles. Drivers are required to practice the organization's intersection operating guidelines during all emergency responses.

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Uncontrolled intersections

Any intersection that does not offer a control device (stop sign, yield, or traffic signal) in the direction of travel of the emergency vehicle or where a traffic control signal is green upon the approach of the emergency vehicle all emergency vehicle drivers should do the following:

- * Scan the intersection for possible hazards (right turns on red, pedestrians, vehicles traveling fast, etc.) Observe traffic in all 4 directions (left, right, front, and rear).
- * Slow down if any potential hazards are detected and cover the brake pedal with the driver's foot.
- * Change the siren cadence not less than 200 feet from intersection
- * Avoid using the opposing lane of traffic if at all possible.

Emergency vehicle drivers should always be prepared to stop. If another vehicle operator fails to yield the right of way to an emergency vehicle, the emergency vehicle driver cannot force the right of way, nor can you assume the right of way, therefore you do not have the right of way until the other vehicle yields to you.

Controlled intersections

Any intersection controlled by a stop sign, yield sign, yellow traffic light or a red traffic light requires a complete stop by the emergency vehicle driver. In addition to bringing the vehicle to a complete stop these additional steps must be followed as well;

- * Do not rely on warning devices to clear traffic
- * Scan the intersection for possible hazards (right turns on red, pedestrians, vehicles traveling fast, etc.) as well as driver options.
- * Begin to slow down well before reaching the intersection and cover the brake pedal with the driver's foot, continue to scan in all 4 directions (left, right, front, rear).
- * Change the siren cadence not less than 200 feet from intersection
- * Scan intersection for possible passing options (pass on right, left, wait, etc.) avoid using the opposing lane of traffic if at all possible.
- * Come to a complete stop
- * Establish eye contact with other vehicle drivers: have partner communicate all is clear; reconfirm all other vehicles are stopped.
- * Proceed one lane of traffic at a time treating each lane of traffic as a separate intersection.

6. Non-emergency response

When responding to a call in a non-emergency response mode or normal flow of traffic (not responding to a true emergency) the vehicle will be operated without any audible or visual warning devices and in compliance with all state motor vehicle laws that apply to civilian traffic. At no time during response should an emergency vehicle be operated with only visual warning devices.

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7. Ordinary travel procedures

All drivers shall obey all traffic laws and traffic control devices when driving any fire district vehicle under ordinary travel conditions. Any driver observed breaking any traffic laws or driving any vehicle in an aggressive manner will be subject to disciplinary action including suspension of driving privileges.

8. Riding policy

The department requires all persons riding on fire apparatus to be seated in approved riding positions and be secured to the vehicle by seat belts whenever the vehicle is in motion. The emergency vehicle driver and/or the person riding in the officer position shall verify that all personnel are properly seated and in seat belts before the vehicle is moved. Standard communication signals should be formulated and utilized by all personnel. The department prohibits the riding on tail steps, sidesteps, running boards, or any other exposed position.

9. Backing

The department recognizes that backing emergency vehicles is made hazardous by the fact that the driver cannot see much of where he/she intends to go. The department recommends that whenever possible drivers should avoid backing up. The safest way to back up a vehicle is not to back it up at all. When it is necessary to backup any department vehicle, all drivers shall follow one of the two following measures:

* The department's first choice of backing procedures is that before any vehicle is put into reverse and backed up that a spotter be in place near the rear of the vehicle. The spotter should be safely positioned so that the emergency vehicle driver can see the spotter at all times. If at any time the emergency vehicle driver loses sight of the spotter, he/she shall stop immediately until the spotter makes himself/herself visible again.

* If conditions exist that make the use of spotters impossible, all drivers, before attempting to back up any fire department vehicle, will make a circle of safety to see that no person or persons are directly behind the vehicle or in its intended path of travel; all equipment is secured and that all compartment doors are securely closed; and any physical obstructions are moved out of the way. The emergency vehicle driver should also note all potential obstructions in the intended path of travel.

10. Response in privately-owned vehicles

When any member responds to the station or to the scene of an emergency in his/her private vehicle, each member must strictly adhere to all applicable motor vehicle laws. Privately-owned vehicles are not provided with the same exemptions that are provided to emergency vehicles. No member of the organization will be permitted to violate any motor vehicle laws, including but not limited to:

- speed,
- going through traffic control devices,
- passing in an unsafe manner.

While it is recognized that timeliness in response to an emergency is important, it is imperative that all drivers understand that their private vehicles are not emergency vehicles and therefore are not afforded any exemptions or special privileges under state law. Any driver observed breaking any traffic laws or operating any vehicle in an aggressive or unsafe manner will be subject to disciplinary action including suspension, loss of driving privileges and withdrawal of courtesy light permit.

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11. General guidelines

- a. No member may operate a Fire District vehicle without a valid driver's license.
- b. No member may operate a Fire District vehicle while under the influence of alcohol or any controlled substance.
- c. Drivers of apparatus shall not exceed the posted speed limit and must use extreme caution at all intersections.
- d. At no time is apparatus to be left unattended when moved from the confines of its assigned quarters. The only exception being 3471 and 3462 if all the vehicles door have been locked and the driver has the key.
- e. Drivers are responsible to see that apparatus is fueled at all times.
- f. No one other than active members of the Oswego Town Fire Department may ride on apparatus without the consent of the Chief or Board of Fire Commissioners.
- g. Smoking is prohibited on apparatus at all times.
- h. When a vehicle leaves quarters answering an alarm it shall contact Oswego Fire Control and call enroute via radio. After calling enroute the officer in charge shall change the vehicle radio to the appropriate fire ground channel being used for the incident. When the truck has returned to quarters, the vehicle radio shall be changed back to System 7 Group 1.
- i. The driver of the apparatus is responsible for signing the alarm book indicating that he/she was the driver for the alarm.
- j. The driver of any Fire District apparatus will stay with the equipment at the scene of a fire unless relieved by another qualified operator.
- k. No apparatus will be taken out of the Oswego Town Fire District without consent of a chief.
- l. It is the officer's responsibility to see that the apparatus, upon arrival back at the station, is cleaned.
- m. In accordance with State Law, the chief shall ensure that department members display only one blue light and are fully cognizant of safe driver rules and regulations to be followed while responding to alarms.
- n. Apparatus drivers must be a minimum of 21 years of age.
- o. No member shall be a qualified driver unless approved by the officers line.
- p. Only qualified drivers shall be permitted to drive apparatus to and from alarms, except by order of the officer in charge, who may designate another member of the department as a driver, in an emergency.
- q. Driver trainees operating district vehicles must be accompanied by a qualified driver at all times.
- r. On other than fire and emergency calls, apparatus shall not be driven unless a driver is accompanied by at least one other member. Exceptions are retrieving members from the hospital and maintenance related issues,
- s. All qualified drivers will drive their company apparatus at least five (5) miles month and operate the pump once each month.
- t. At no time shall a driver pass a stopped school bus that has its lights flashing. This applies to all apparatus whether responding to an alarm or on drill.
- u. When responding in a convoy style (two or more trucks/chiefs in a row) the same route shall be taken by all trucks. No truck shall break off and attempt to take a faster route. All trucks shall follow the lead truck. The only exception is if specifically directed by the incident commander to take an alternate route.

Remember - You have an obligation to get the fire apparatus and its riders to and from the scene in a safe and professional manner.

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Defensive Driving

What is it? A mixture of courtesy and common sense, it is the anticipation of what other drivers may do and compensating for their actions. The defensive driver is a confident driver. He anticipates and counters errors made by other drivers. He adjusts his driving to changes in traffic, weather, and road conditions. The elements of defensive driving are:

ALERTNESS. JUDGEMENT. SKILL. FORESIGHT, and KNOWLEDGE.

How do we apply it ?

1. Walking around and checking the vehicle before getting into it. Children play in streets and between parked cars and are especially abundant at emergency scenes.
2. Using caution pulling away from the curb. Always look, signal, and look again before pulling out.
3. Always using your seatbelt.
4. Maintaining sufficient distance from vehicles ahead - one truck length for every ten miles per hour. Allow for greater distances during hazardous conditions. The total stopping distance for an average fire truck at 40mph is approximately 250 feet, almost the length of a football field.
5. Never changing your driving lane suddenly. Always look and signal.
6. Driving at a safe speed for the road conditions and the time of day.
7. Using proper turn signals.
8. Placing the foot above the brake pedal at all intersections.
9. Adjusting to the actions of other drivers. Using caution, courtesy, and common sense.
10. At every curve assume there will be an obstruction in your path.
11. Recognizing hazardous conditions and sizing up the situation.
12. Keeping control of the vehicle at all times by controlling your speed and anticipating the actions of the other driver.
13. Remembering that even using the siren and air horn may not warn the unwary civilian car driver of the approaching apparatus. People act strangely when confronted with an emergency vehicle weaving in and out of traffic.

Remember these points when driving:

- * Aim high in steering
 - * Get the big picture
 - * Keep your eyes moving
 - * Make sure they see you
- * **Leave yourself a way out**

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Extracts from the New York State Motor Vehicle and Traffic Law

Title 1, Art 1-114-B: Authorized Emergency Vehicle: A fire vehicle's emergency operation shall not include returning from such operations.

Title 7, Art 23-1104: The driver of an authorized emergency vehicle when involved in an emergency operation may:

1. Stop, stand or park irrespective of the provisions of this title:
2. Proceed past a steady red signal, a flashing red signal, or a stop sign, but only after slowing down as may be necessary for safe operation.
3. Exceed the maximum speed limit as long as he/she does not endanger life or property.
4. Disregard regulations governing direction of movement or turning in specified directions.

** These exemptions are granted only if audible signals and red lights are displayed on the front of the emergency vehicle.

The above 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 such provisions protect the driver from the consequences of his reckless disregard for the safety of other.