

14-08 - Handling Traffic Crashes as a Crime Scene

Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department

NEWSLETTER

Field Operations Support Services



OVERVIEW

A crash occurs after a vehicle code violation is committed, which by definition is a crime, and is to be treated and investigated as such. Traffic crash scenes are, in fact, crime scenes and many times involve death, serious injury, and massive financial loss.

The movement of vehicles, items within the vehicles, including patrol cars, or items within the traffic crash scene shall be avoided, if possible. This can offset the weight and measurements necessary to complete an accurate investigation. The accuracy of an investigation is a key factor in determining the degree of fault of each party involved. This is instrumental in mitigating Department and Department member liability in a deputy-involved crash.

CONSIDERATIONS

The handling unit at a traffic crash involving death, serious injury, or major property damage should ensure the following takes place:

- Secure and control the traffic crash scene. As in all crime scenes, utilize crime scene tape to cordon off the area and prevent entry. This may also involve setting up traffic cones and barricades to establish necessary traffic control.
- A major incident log should be started and monitored from the start to completion of the investigation. Anyone who enters the crime scene must sign the major incident log and indicate the reason for entry. In addition, the arrival and notification times of all parties should be documented.
- If exigent circumstances require moving the involved vehicles, the point(s) of rest, area(s) of impact, and all evidence shall be properly marked and secured.

Photograph, videotape, and draw a sketch of the entire scene. Use of high-quality photographic equipment should also be taken whenever possible. Consider using aerial photography.

- The handling deputy must remain at the scene until the investigation is complete or upon being properly relieved.
- When witnesses are not able to remain at the scene, the assigned patrol deputy should obtain their contact information to allow detectives to contact witness(s) at a later time.

As circumstances dictate, protect the body and scene from public view. This may be accomplished by the positioning of radio cars or utilizing barricades. Remember, every effort should be made to protect the integrity of the scene.

Note: Unless instructed by a representative from the Coroner's Office, a dead body should not be moved or touched.

- Field personnel at the scene need to be cognizant of their actions and possible consequences. Professional demeanor in light of the gravity of the incident is paramount to a positive public perception of the Department.
- Make necessary notifications to the station Watch Commander, station traffic detectives, and Traffic Services Detail (via Sheriff Information Bureau, SIB at [REDACTED TEXT] in a timely manner.

BOTTOM LINE

Keep in mind, all traffic crashes (including fatal, non-fatal, and deputy involved) are subject to criminal prosecution based on the information and evidence collected at the scene of the traffic crash. Handle a traffic crash scene as you would any other crime scene.

Information regarding the content of this newsletter may be directed to Field Operations Support Services.
