

Vehicle Pursuits

305.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides guidelines for vehicle pursuits in order to protect the safety of involved officers, the public and fleeing suspects (RCW 43.101.226(3)).

305.1.1 DEFINITIONS

Definitions related to this policy include:

Blocking or vehicle intercept - A slow-speed coordinated maneuver where two or more pursuing vehicles simultaneously intercept and block the movement of a suspect vehicle, the driver of which may be unaware of the impending enforcement stop. The goal is containment and preventing a pursuit. Blocking is not a moving or stationary road block.

Boxing-in - A tactic designed to stop a suspect's vehicle by surrounding it with law enforcement vehicles and then slowing all vehicles to a stop.

Pursuit Intervention Technique (PIT) - A low-speed maneuver designed to cause the suspect vehicle to spin out, stall and come to a stop.

Ramming - The deliberate act of contacting a suspect's vehicle with another law enforcement vehicle to functionally damage or otherwise force the suspect's vehicle to stop.

Roadblocks - A tactic designed to stop a suspect's vehicle by intentionally placing a law enforcement vehicle or other immovable object in the path of the suspect's vehicle.

Terminate - To discontinue a pursuit or stop chasing fleeing vehicles.

Tire deflation device - A device designed to puncture the tires of the pursued vehicle.

Trail - Following the path of the pursuit at a safe speed while obeying all traffic laws and without activating emergency equipment. If the pursuit is at a slow rate of speed, the trailing vehicle will maintain sufficient distance from the pursuit vehicles so as to clearly indicate an absence of participation in the pursuit.

Vehicle pursuit - An event involving one or more law enforcement officers attempting to apprehend a suspect, who is attempting to avoid arrest while operating a vehicle by using high-speed driving or other evasive tactics, such as driving off a highway, turning suddenly or driving in a legal manner but willfully failing to yield to an officer's emergency signal to stop.

305.1.2 ATTEMPTING TO ELUDE

Refers to the actions of a vehicle operator who after being given a visual or audible signal to bring the vehicle to a stop fails or refuses to immediately stop the vehicle and drives in a reckless manner while attempting to elude a uniformed officer operating a pursuing police vehicle that is equipped with emergency lights and siren (RCW 46.61.024).

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305.2 POLICY

It is the policy of this department to weigh the importance of apprehending suspects who unlawfully flee from law enforcement against the risks associated with vehicle pursuits.

305.2.1 WHEN TO INITIATE A PURSUIT

An officer may initiate a vehicle pursuit if:

- (a) The officer has a reasonable belief that the driver or another occupant, if allowed to flee, would present a danger to human life or cause serious physical injury;
- (b) The circumstances justifying the decision to pursue an eluding vehicle are articulable at the time the officer initiates the pursuit;
- (c) The decision to initiate a pursuit is based on the pursuing officer's conclusion that the immediate danger to the officer and the public created by the pursuit is less than the immediate or potential danger to the public should the suspect remain at large.

Unless a greater hazard would result, a pursuit should not be undertaken if the subject(s) can be identified with enough certainty that they can be apprehended later.

Officer will not pursue solely for one or more of the following:

- (a) Traffic violation/civil infractions
- (b) Misdemeanors/gross misdemeanors
- (c) Property crimes
- (d) The act of eluding alone

Exception: Officers may pursue a DUI suspect if the violator's vehicle is being operated so as to pose a clear and present danger to human life or likely to cause serious injury.

305.3 PURSUIT VEHICLES

Vehicle pursuits should be limited to three police department emergency vehicles (two pursuit vehicles and the supervisor vehicle). However, the number of vehicles involved will vary with the circumstances.

An officer or supervisor may request that additional vehicles join a pursuit if, after assessing the factors outlined above, it appears that the number of officers involved would be insufficient to safely arrest the number of suspects. All other officers shall stay out of the pursuit but should remain alert to its progress and location. Any officer who drops out of a pursuit may then, if necessary, proceed to the pursuit termination point at legal speeds, following the appropriate rules of the road.

305.3.1 VEHICLES WITHOUT EMERGENCY EQUIPMENT

Officers operating vehicles not equipped with emergency lights and siren are prohibited from initiating or joining in any pursuit. Officers in such vehicles may provide support to pursuing vehicles as long as the vehicle is operated in compliance with all traffic laws. Those officers should discontinue such support immediately upon arrival of a sufficient number of authorized emergency police department vehicles or any air support.

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305.3.2 PRIMARY PURSUIT VEHICLE RESPONSIBILITIES

The initial pursuing officer will be designated as the primary pursuit vehicle and will be responsible for the conduct of the pursuit unless he/she is unable to remain reasonably close to the suspect's vehicle. The primary responsibility of the officer initiating the pursuit is the apprehension of the suspect without unreasonable danger to him/herself or others.

The primary pursuing officer should notify the dispatcher, commencing with a request for emergency radio traffic, that a vehicle pursuit has been initiated, and as soon as practicable provide information including, but not limited to:

- (a) The location, direction of travel and estimated speed of the suspect's vehicle.
- (b) The description of the suspect's vehicle including the license plate number, if known.
- (c) The reason for the pursuit.
- (d) The use of firearms, threat of force, violence, injuries, hostages or other unusual hazards.

Until relieved by a supervisor or a secondary pursuing officer, the officer in the primary pursuit vehicle shall be responsible for broadcasting the progress of the pursuit. Unless circumstances reasonably indicate otherwise, the primary pursuing officer should, as soon as practicable, relinquish the responsibility of broadcasting the progress of the pursuit to an officer in a secondary pursuit vehicle or to air support joining the pursuit to minimize distractions and allow the primary pursuing officer to concentrate foremost on safe pursuit tactics.

305.3.3 SECONDARY PURSUIT VEHICLE RESPONSIBILITIES

The second officer in the pursuit will be designated as the secondary pursuit vehicle and is responsible for:

- (a) Immediately notifying the dispatcher of his/her entry into the pursuit.
- (b) Remaining a safe distance behind the primary pursuit vehicle unless directed to assume the role of primary pursuit vehicle or if the primary pursuit vehicle is unable to continue the pursuit.
- (c) Broadcasting information that the primary pursuing officer is unable to provide.
- (d) Serving as backup to the primary pursuing officer once the suspect has been stopped.

305.4 SUPERVISORY CONTROL AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Available supervisory and management control will be exercised over all vehicle pursuits involving officers from this department.

The field supervisor of the officer initiating the pursuit, or if unavailable, the nearest field supervisor, will be responsible for:

- (a) Immediately notifying involved officers and the dispatcher of supervisory presence and ascertaining all reasonably available information to continuously assess the situation and risk factors associated with the pursuit. This is to ensure that the pursuit is conducted within established department guidelines.

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- (b) Engaging in the pursuit, when appropriate, to provide on-scene supervision.
- (c) Exercising management and control of the pursuit even if not engaged in it.
- (d) Directing that the pursuit be terminated if, in his/her judgment, it is not justified to continue the pursuit under the guidelines of this policy.
- (e) Ensuring the notification and/or coordination of outside agencies if the pursuit either leaves or is likely to leave the jurisdiction of this department.
- (f) Preparing a post-pursuit review and documentation of the pursuit as required.

305.4.1 SHIFT SERGEANT RESPONSIBILITIES

Upon becoming aware that a pursuit has been initiated, the Shift Sergeant should monitor and continually assess the situation and ensure the pursuit is conducted within the guidelines and requirements of this policy. The Shift Sergeant has the final responsibility for the coordination, control and termination of a vehicle pursuit and shall be in overall command.

The Shift Sergeant shall review all pertinent reports for content and forward them to the Division Commander.

305.5 SNOCO911

If the pursuit is confined within the City limits, radio communications will be conducted on the primary channel unless instructed otherwise by a supervisor or dispatcher. If the pursuit leaves the jurisdiction of this department or such is imminent, involved officers should, whenever available, switch radio communications to a tactical or emergency channel most accessible by participating agencies.

305.6 LOSS OF PURSUED VEHICLE

When the pursued vehicle is lost, the involved officers should broadcast pertinent information to assist other officers in locating the vehicle. The primary pursuing officer or supervisor will be responsible for coordinating any further search for either the pursued vehicle or suspects fleeing on foot.

305.7 INTERJURISDICTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

When a pursuit enters another agency's jurisdiction, the primary pursuing officer or supervisor, taking into consideration the distance traveled, unfamiliarity with the area and other pertinent facts, should determine whether to request the other agency to assume the pursuit.

Unless entry into another jurisdiction is expected to be brief, it is generally recommended that the primary pursuing officer or supervisor ensure that notification is provided to each outside jurisdiction into which the pursuit is reasonably expected to enter, regardless of whether the jurisdiction is expected to assist.

305.7.1 ASSUMPTION OF PURSUIT BY ANOTHER AGENCY

Officers will relinquish control of the pursuit when another agency has assumed the pursuit, unless the continued assistance of the Lake Stevens Police Department is requested by the agency

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assuming the pursuit. Upon relinquishing control of the pursuit, the involved officers may proceed, with supervisory approval, to the termination point of the pursuit to assist in the investigation. The supervisor should coordinate such assistance with the assuming agency and obtain any information that is necessary for any reports.

The roles and responsibilities of officers at the termination point of a pursuit initiated by this department shall be coordinated with appropriate consideration of the needs of the agency assuming the pursuit.

Notification of a pursuit in progress should not be construed as a request to join the pursuit. Requests to or from another agency to assume a pursuit should be specific. Because of communication limitations between local law enforcement agencies, a request for another agency's assistance will mean that its personnel will assume responsibility for the pursuit. For the same reasons, when a pursuit leaves another jurisdiction and a request for assistance is made to this department, the other agency should relinquish control.

305.7.2 PURSUITS EXTENDING INTO THIS JURISDICTION

The agency that initiates a pursuit shall be responsible for conducting the pursuit. Officers from this department should not join a pursuit unless specifically requested to do so by the pursuing agency and with approval from a supervisor. The exception to this is when a single vehicle from the initiating agency is in pursuit. Under this circumstance, an officer from this department may, with supervisor approval, immediately join the pursuit until sufficient vehicles from the initiating agency join the pursuit or until additional information is provided allowing withdrawal from the pursuit.

When a request is made for this department to assist or take over a pursuit that has entered the jurisdiction of the Lake Stevens Police Department, the supervisor should consider:

- (a) The public's safety within this jurisdiction.
- (b) The safety of the pursuing officers.
- (c) Whether the circumstances are serious enough to continue the pursuit.
- (d) Whether there is adequate staffing to continue the pursuit.
- (e) The ability to maintain the pursuit.

As soon as practicable, a supervisor or the Shift Sergeant should review a request for assistance from another agency. The Shift Sergeant or supervisor, after considering the above factors, may decline to assist in or assume the other agency's pursuit.

Assistance to a pursuing agency by officers of this department will conclude at the City limits, provided that the pursuing agency has sufficient assistance from other sources. Ongoing participation from this department may continue only until sufficient assistance is present.

In the event that the termination point of a pursuit from another agency is within this jurisdiction, officers shall provide appropriate assistance including, but not limited to, scene control, coordination and completion of supplemental reports and any other assistance requested or needed.

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305.8 PURSUIT INTERVENTION

Pursuit intervention is an attempt to stop the suspect's ability to continue to flee in a vehicle through tactical application of technology, tire deflation devices, blocking or vehicle intercept, boxing-in, the PIT, ramming or roadblock procedures.

305.8.1 WHEN USE IS AUTHORIZED

Whenever practicable, an officer shall seek approval from a supervisor before employing any intervention to stop the pursued vehicle. In deciding whether to use intervention tactics, officers/supervisors should balance the risk of allowing the pursuit to continue with the potential hazards arising from the use of each tactic to the public, the officers and persons in or on the pursued vehicle. With this in mind, the decision to use any intervention tactic should be reasonable in light of the circumstances apparent to the officer at the time of the decision.

305.8.2 USE OF FIREARMS

The use of firearms to disable a pursued vehicle is not generally an effective tactic and involves all the dangers associated with discharging firearms. Officers should not utilize firearms during an ongoing pursuit unless the conditions and circumstances meet the requirements authorizing the use of deadly force. Nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit any officer from using a firearm to stop a suspect from using a vehicle as a deadly weapon.

305.8.3 INTERVENTION STANDARDS

Any intervention tactic, depending upon the conditions and circumstances under which it is used, may present dangers to the officers, the public or anyone in or on the vehicle being pursued. Certain applications of intervention tactics may be construed to be a use of force, including deadly force, and are subject to policies guiding such use. Officers shall consider these facts and requirements prior to deciding how, when, where and if an intervention tactic should be employed.

- (a) Blocking or vehicle intercept should only be considered in cases involving felony suspects or impaired drivers who pose a threat to the public's safety, and when officers reasonably believe that attempting a conventional enforcement stop will likely result in the driver attempting to flee in the vehicle. Because of the potential risks involved, this intervention tactic should only be employed by properly trained officers and after giving consideration to the following:
 - 1. The need to immediately stop the suspect vehicle or prevent it from leaving substantially outweighs the risk of injury or death to occupants of the suspect vehicle, officers or others.
 - 2. All other reasonable intervention tactics have failed or reasonably appear ineffective.
 - 3. Employing the blocking or vehicle intercept maneuver does not unreasonably increase the risk of danger to those involved or the public.
 - 4. The suspect vehicle is stopped or traveling at a low speed.
 - 5. Only law enforcement vehicles should be used in this tactic.

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- (b) The PIT is limited to use by properly trained officers with the approval of a supervisor and upon assessment of the circumstances and conditions presented at the time, including the potential for risk of injury to officers, the public and occupants of the pursued vehicle.
- (c) Ramming a fleeing vehicle should be done only after other reasonable tactical means at the officers's disposal have been exhausted or would not be effective, and immediate control is necessary. Ramming should be reserved for situations where there does not appear to be another reasonable alternative method. If there does not reasonably appear to be a present or immediately foreseeable serious threat to the public, the use of ramming is not authorized. When ramming is used as a means to stop a fleeing vehicle, the following factors should be present:
 - 1. The suspect is an actual or suspected felon, who reasonably appears to represent a serious threat to the public if not apprehended.
 - 2. The suspect is driving with willful or wanton disregard for the safety of other persons or is driving in a reckless and life-endangering manner or using the vehicle as a weapon.
- (d) Boxing-in a suspect vehicle should only be attempted upon approval by a supervisor. The use of such a tactic must be carefully coordinated with all involved vehicles, taking into consideration the circumstances and conditions apparent at the time, as well as the potential risk of injury to officers, the public and occupants of the pursued vehicle. Officers and supervisors should weigh the potential consequences against the need to immediately stop the vehicle.
- (e) Tire deflation devices should be deployed only after notification of pursuing officers and the supervisor of the intent and location of the intended deployment, and in a manner that:
 - 1. Should reasonably only affect the pursued vehicle.
 - 2. Provides the deploying officer adequate cover and escape from intentional or unintentional exposure to the approaching vehicle.
 - 3. Takes into account the limitations of such devices as well as the potential risk to officers, the public and occupants of the pursued vehicle.
 - 4. Takes into account whether the pursued vehicle is a motorcycle, a vehicle transporting hazardous materials or a school bus transporting children.
- (f) Because roadblocks involve a potential for serious injury or death to occupants of the pursued vehicle if the suspect does not stop, the intentional placement of roadblocks in the direct path of a pursued vehicle is generally discouraged and should not be deployed without prior approval of a supervisor. If roadblocks are deployed, it should only be done under extraordinary conditions when all other reasonable intervention tactics have failed or reasonably appear ineffective and the need to immediately stop the pursued vehicle substantially outweighs the risks of injury or death to occupants of the pursued vehicle, officers or the public.

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305.9 CAPTURE OF SUSPECTS

Proper self-discipline and sound professional judgment are the keys to a successful conclusion of a pursuit and apprehension of evading suspects. Officers shall use only that amount of force that reasonably appears necessary given the facts and circumstances perceived by the officer at the time of the event to accomplish a legitimate law enforcement purpose.

Unless relieved by a supervisor, the primary pursuing officer should coordinate efforts to apprehend the suspect following the pursuit. Officers should consider the safety of the public and the involved officers when formulating plans for setting up perimeters or for containing and capturing the suspect.

305.10 REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

All appropriate reports shall be completed to comply with appropriate laws and policies or procedures.

- (a) The primary pursuing officer shall complete appropriate crime/arrest reports.
- (b) The primary pursuing officer or supervisor shall complete the appropriate pursuit report.
- (c) After first obtaining the available information, the involved, or if unavailable, on-duty field supervisor shall promptly complete a supervisor's log or interoffice memorandum, briefly summarizing the pursuit to the Chief of Police or the authorized designee.
- (d) After receiving copies of reports, logs and other pertinent information, the Chief of Police or the authorized designee shall conduct or assign the completion of a post-pursuit review, as appropriate.
- (e) Annually, the Chief of Police should direct a documented review and analysis of department vehicle pursuits to minimally include policy suitability, policy compliance and training needs.

305.11 REGULAR AND PERIODIC PURSUIT TRAINING

In addition to initial and supplementary training on pursuits, all officers will participate, no less than annually, in regular and periodic training addressing this policy and the importance of vehicle safety and protecting the public. Training will include recognition of the need to balance the known offense and the need for immediate capture against the risks to officers and others.

305.12 POLICY REVIEW

Officers of this department shall certify in writing that they have received, read and understand this policy initially, upon any amendments and whenever training on the policy is provided.