

Minor Accident Response-Policy Overview

In response to Council's request for information on our procedure for response to non-injury accidents where the vehicles do not require towing, we polled our Benchmark Cities Group to see how they handle similar calls. The thirteen responses varied from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Some agencies respond to all accidents unless inclement weather or other emergency prohibits them from doing so, even on private property where no one is injured or believed to be intoxicated. Several agencies had an estimated damage amount that determined whether or not a full accident report was taken. Some had procedures very similar to ours. Among those comparable to ours several agencies noted that if one of the involved parties requested a report be taken then an officer took some form of accident report (some agencies would only give this option for accidents on the roadway, not private property accidents). If both parties agreed that no accident report was necessary the responding officer provided forms that could be used for the drivers to self report the accident to the state. In all instances an officer or service aide responds to the scene and ensures drivers are licensed, insured and have no warrants for their arrest.

In addition to the Benchmark Cities information we received, three other agencies in Missouri were contacted in regards to their accident policies. Listed below is a summary of each department's policy/procedure. A complete copy of the policy/procedure is available if needed.

Springfield, Missouri

Responds to all reported traffic crashes, regardless of severity or injury/lack thereof. If officers respond and the parties involved request to do so, they can simply exchange information if both have valid driver's licenses, valid proof of insurance and the Missouri Uniform Accident Reporting System guidelines for the use of a "long form" do not apply.

Kansas City, Missouri

Officers do not respond to non-injury accidents where:

- a. vehicles are driveable
- b. no intoxicated drivers are involved
- c. no third-party caller
- d. drivers produce license and insurance (to each other)

These calls are handled using an "alternative handling" protocol which includes, walk in reports, telephone reports, transfer to a Teleserve Officer, or handling by the call taker without initiating a police response.

St. Louis County Police

Officers are dispatched to all vehicle accidents on public roadways or private property that have just occurred. A Missouri Uniform Accident Report is required for all vehicle accidents. If the accident involves property damage only (no injuries) where the damage is estimated to be less than \$500 the officer may use a “short form”.

Summary

Some agencies are at one end of the spectrum and treat all minor accidents as civil matters and do not respond to any minor accidents on private property. Other agencies fall at the opposite end of the spectrum and respond to every accident regardless of location, level of damage or injury and take a full report. It appears that the current procedure used by the Columbia Police Department falls somewhere in the middle, as do most of the other agencies who responded or were researched.

Recommendation

Lean budgetary times have forced city governments to consider changes that will maximize available resources. In response our Department made this procedural change, and is also considering other changes related to minor shoplifting offenses and burglar alarms.

Minor accidents are essentially a civil matter between the involved parties, and the primary reason for the 2009 change was to relieve officers from creating a very time consuming report on a non-criminal matter. Since the accident policy was changed in 2009 it is estimated the Department has saved over \$100,000.00, or the approximate salary cost of three full-time police officers.

It is recommended the Columbia Police Department continue with the current policy of responding to all accident calls. Officers shall respond to ensure all drivers involved are licensed and insured and no other criminal offense has been committed, but will only complete an accident report if any involved vehicle cannot be driven away due to damage, or an injury to any person has occurred as a result of the accident. In the interest of customer service, the department will create a “short form” of some type to utilize in instances where a report is requested but not required according to our procedure. This form will be designed to meet our customer’s need for an “accident report”, while also eliminating some of the more time consuming (and often unnecessary) aspects of accident reporting, such as diagramming. We will also examine the feasibility of offering these forms online for self reporting, as well as online access to printing the accident report once the officer has completed it.

Benchmark Cities Responses

Chesapeake, VA - We send a police officer who helps them exchange driver and vehicle information. He then instructs them that it is a civil matter. Then we leave.

San Angelo, TX - responds to all traffic crashes. If the damage is less than \$1000 or the accident occurs on private property, the officer assists the motorist with getting the correct forms and information. If the accident is over \$1000, a crash report is completed.

Lakewood, CO - responds to all accidents except in inclement weather or on private property with no extenuating circumstances (DUI, reckless, serious injury). We take a report if there is damage, as determining the amount of damage can be a challenge. We do offer desk reporting for minor accidents if both parties agree.

Norman, OK - we normally respond to ALL reported traffic collisions on public roadways and private property. Once the officer arrives he has some options. Our policy does have an exception for inclement weather, special events, or extraordinary circumstances.

Boca Raton, FL - We respond to all accidents, whether it is a Service Aide or if the situation warrants an officer. A report is completed. If it is a delayed report, then we just give them a form to fill out for informational purposes.

Plano, TX - We respond to all minor crashes as you have described below. We complete a crash report if either of the parties wants us to investigate. If neither party wants us to investigate the crash, we provide both with a "blue form" to self report the crash to the State.

Boulder, CO - We respond if it is on a city street. Exceptions are made in extreme weather conditions when we have many accidents. We go on accident alert and refer minor accidents to do a counter report at a later time. We do not respond to minor accidents on private property, such as in shopping center parking lots.

Henderson, NV - Henderson PD will respond to all accidents on the roadway. If the damage is below \$750.00 the responding officer will exchange information with the drivers of each vehicle. If the damage is over \$750.00 the officer will take a report and issue a citation to the at-fault

driver.

Naperville, IL - Our policies are the same as Lakewood.

Olathe, KS - We respond to all motor vehicle accidents in the roadway. If damage is estimated at under \$1000.00, we let the person know that a report is not mandated by the State, but if they elect to file one (and the victim usually wants one) we do file an accident report. If damage is over \$1000.00 (or any injury), we automatically do a state accident report. We do not measure scenes for a diagram on anything less than an injury accident. Our dispatchers are supposed to tell people to move vehicles from the roadway if they are not disabled.

Private property accidents are another matter. If the accident is on a traffic way on private property; the same standards apply as if it were in the roadway. If the accident is not in a traffic way, (parking space, unpaved fields, etc.) then we do not do any accident report unless the accident results in a fatality. This procedure is determined by State law. If we are dispatched to a private property accident, we will respond and verify that all drivers are properly licensed and have insurance, after which we provide the drivers with an insurance exchange form that Olathe PD designed (it is extremely basic) that they can each fill out and swap with one another to facilitate reporting to their insurance companies.

Cedar Rapids, IA - responds to all accidents on the public roadway/right of way/ property. If road/weather conditions delay our response or are too severe we modify to only respond to injury accidents or accidents that are blocking traffic. We also respond to accidents on private property to facilitate exchange of information if time allows. We do respond to injury accidents on private property. We are required by law to complete a state accident report if there is personal injury or fatality and if property damage exceeds \$2,000. Property damage accidents below the threshold are not reported by us to the State. Drivers are required to complete an accident report and submit it to the State on their own. In most cases we can respond to every accident to assist.

Bellevue, WA - Washington State law sets the threshold for reportable non-injury collisions at \$700. It is not a mandate but a definition. Our officers have the discretion to assist motorists in exchanging information rather than take a report if:

- Both parties have valid insurance and license

- Both parties are in agreement as to the facts
- There is no criminal cause (like DUI) in the crash
- Officer can cancel response if the parties feel they can resolve it on their own

If the parties insist on the collision report, we will take one for them. We will not take private property collisions of any kind unless there is criminal cause or injury or significant property damage (like a vehicle through a building).

Accident Calls taken from 2008 thru 2011

Year/Month	Calls	STARS	%
2008	4573	2813	
Jan	391	231	59.1%
Feb	475	268	56.4%
Mar	320	180	56.3%
Apr	354	226	63.8%
May	369	227	61.5%
Jun	338	208	61.5%
Jul	344	215	62.5%
Aug	349	219	62.8%
Sep	386	252	65.3%
Oct	405	256	63.2%
Nov	394	259	65.7%
Dec	448	272	60.7%
2009	4209	2565	
Jan	333	209	62.8%
Feb	300	197	65.7%
Mar	342	218	63.7%
Apr	371	257	69.3%
May	368	254	69.0%
Jun	307	209	68.1%
Jul	292	176	60.3%
Aug	362	235	64.9%
Sep	352	231	65.6%
Oct	453	282	62.3%
Nov	344	154	44.8%
Dec	385	143	37.1%

Year/Month	Calls	STARS	%
2010	4635	1377	
Jan	404	99	24.5%
Feb	391	109	27.9%
Mar	378	122	32.3%
Apr	382	112	29.3%
May	353	111	31.4%
Jun	326	94	28.8%
Jul	345	95	27.5%
Aug	375	116	30.9%
Sep	401	135	33.7%
Oct	465	138	29.7%
Nov	418	136	32.5%
Dec	397	110	27.7%
2011	4421	1220	
Jan	464	114	24.6%
Feb	440	97	22.0%
Mar	339	100	29.5%
Apr	313	98	31.3%
May	306	95	31.0%
Jun	338	101	29.9%
Jul	266	75	28.2%
Aug	322	93	28.9%
Sep	409	115	28.1%
Oct	388	110	28.4%
Nov	351	106	30.2%
Dec	485	116	23.9%

Policy was changed in November of 2009