



Sheridan Police Department
Policies and Procedures
18.2 Replaces 404.5
Chapter 18 – Traffic
Section 2 – Crash Investigations

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Signature:

The effective investigation of motor vehicle crashes is an important component of the Sheridan Police Department's crash prevention efforts. The purpose of crash investigation is to properly determine the causative factors present in the crash and utilize these factors to develop enforcement programs intended to reduce the frequency of crashes.

18.2.1 Crash Investigation and Reporting

- A. The Sheridan Police Department will respond to all reported traffic crashes.
- B. Wyoming Statute 31-5-1105 requires the driver of a vehicle involved in a crash to report the crash to law enforcement when the crash results in:
 - 1. Injury or death of any person;
 - 2. Property damage to an apparent extent of one thousand dollars (\$1000) or more; or
 - 3. Disabling damage to a vehicle preventing its normal and safe operation;
- C. The Sheridan Police Department will complete a crash report on any crash, regardless of injury or the amount of property damage, when one or both parties involved requests that a report be completed at the scene. Officers shall neither advise nor encourage any person involved in a collision to forgo the completion of a crash report.
- D. Additionally officers will investigate:
 - 1. Hit and run crashes;
 - 2. Crashes due to impairment by alcohol and/or drugs;
 - 3. Crashes resulting in leakage of hazardous materials;
 - 4. Property damage in which the property owner is not able to be located;
 - 4. Crashes on private property resulting in injury;
 - 5. Any traffic crash involving city property, vehicles, equipment, or facilities.
- E. While persons filing a delayed report may limit the investigative ability of the officer, every accident reported will be investigated.
- F. Crash data for State reportable incidents is submitted by the department to the state. That data is available to the City of Sheridan and State of Wyoming engineering divisions for analysis of traffic incidents as they relate to the engineering function.

18.2.2 Crash Response

- A. Death or life-threatening injury
A police supervisor as well as an officer trained in advanced crash investigation techniques should be called to the scene of all traffic crash fatalities or crashes resulting in life threatening injuries. The officer trained in advanced crash investigation techniques may be from an outside agency, such as the Wyoming Highway Patrol. The initial responding officer will be

responsible for the crash scene unless properly relieved by another officer. Command staff will be notified and in the case of fatalities the coroner and detective division supervisor will be notified.

B. Hit and run

The initial responding officer will investigate all hit and run crashes, regardless of the time frame in which the crash is alleged to have occurred.

C. Impairment due to alcohol or drugs

If the investigating officer believes that alcohol and/or drugs played a role in a traffic crash; the officer should take all steps necessary to fully investigate. For instance, the investigating officer may request the assistance of a drug recognition expert to assist.

D. Damage to public vehicles or property

Every traffic crash involving a vehicle owned by the City of Sheridan, which is in motion, which results in property damage shall be immediately reported to the on-duty police supervisor by the investigating officer. Crashes involving police department vehicles may be investigated by a supervisor or an outside agency at the discretion of the supervisor or a command officer.

E. Hazardous materials

The initial responding officer shall notify the on-duty supervisor in the event of a crash involving suspected hazardous materials. The officer will be responsible for ensuring that the appropriate resources are notified. Employees should consult the department of transportation emergency response guidebook for procedures in dealing with hazardous cargo.

F. Disturbances between drivers or occupants

Officers shall be assigned to any report of a crash in which the principals have become involved in a disturbance or altercation.

G. Major congestion as a result of the crash

The initial responding officer may request additional units for assistance in the event of traffic congestion as a result of the crash. The additional officers will render all appropriate assistance to clear the congestion as rapidly as possible so as to permit the initial responding officer to investigate the crash. When roadways are congested due to a traffic crash, the supervisor may approve contact with news media so that motorists may be advised of delays and suggested alternative routes.

H. Damage to vehicles to the extent towing is required

Officers may cause disabled vehicles to be towed from crash scenes. If possible, the owner or driver should be allowed to specify a towing company, provided this will not unduly delay clearing the roadway. The next available wrecker from the wrecker list maintained by the communications center should be called if the owner is not present or has no preference.

18.2.3. Crash Scene Responsibilities

A. Responsibilities of the initial responding officer at a crash scene include, but are not limited to:

1. Positioning the police vehicle in a manner that protects the crash scene and the victims, witnesses and investigating officers from further damage or injury.
 - a. The vehicle should be parked far enough away from the scene to give ample warning to oncoming traffic.
 - b. Traffic cones, road flares and/or crime scene tape may be used as needed.
 - c. Officers should wear reflective vests when working in traffic.

2. Taking charge of the crash scene until properly relieved, and evaluating the conditions to determine whether there is a need for more personnel and if so the type.
3. Identifying and assisting the injured, if any (i.e. rendering first aid, requesting emergency medical services, etc.) If injured are transported from the scene, officers will assume responsibility for their property remaining at the scene and arrange for its return.
4. Assessing the scene for the presence of hazards (i.e. leaking fluids, fuel, exposed power lines, or slippery conditions.)
 - a. In the event the crash results in a fire, the officer should immediately request fire personnel be dispatched. The officer should identify the location, the type of vehicle and cargo, and any other pertinent information. If possible, the officer should then make reasonable attempts to extinguish the fire with a fire extinguisher prior to the fire department's arrival.
 - b. In the event the crash results in a fuel or chemical spill, or a ruptured shipping container, officers on the scene will:
 - i. Approach the scene cautiously from upwind;
 - ii. Request the dispatch of fire department Haz-mat personnel;
 - iii. Secure the scene without allowing anyone to enter the immediate hazard area;
 - iv. Identify the hazards using the chemical identification numbers on department of transportation placards posted on involved vehicle/s. Alternate means of identifying the hazards include conferring with fire personnel on the scene, inspecting shipping papers and/or interviewing the driver of the involved vehicle/s;
 - v. Secure a safe perimeter around the scene using available information about the hazard.
 - vi. Avoid walking into or touching spilled materials;
 - vii. Avoid inhalation of fumes, smoke and vapors, even if no dangerous goods are known to be involved.
 - c. In the event the crash results in damage to any utility, the officer on the scene will request communication personnel to notify the appropriate utility company for repairs.
 - d. In the event the crash is a result of a road hazard such as ice on the roadway or damaged roadway, the officer on the scene will relay this information to the communications center, who in turn will notify the city street department or other responsible agency.
5. Collecting and recording short-lived evidence.
6. Examining and recording (photograph, diagram, and note) scene conditions and related factors including, but not limited to:
 - a. Street surfaces;
 - b. Visibility of warning signs or devices (signal lights, pavement markings, etc.);
 - c. Lighting conditions;
 - d. Any hazards that require warnings to motorists; and
 - e. Damage to vehicles.
7. Locating and interviewing drivers, passengers, and witnesses.

8. Assuring the expeditious removal of vehicles and debris from the roadway. In non-injury property damage crashes, vehicles should be removed from the roadway as soon as possible to get the traffic flowing again. If a wrecker is called to the scene, it is the wrecker company's responsibility to remove the debris from the roadway. If a wrecker is not called, it is the officer's responsibility to remove the debris from the roadway to the best extent practicable.
- B. Officers should notify drivers of their reporting responsibilities to the State of Wyoming [Wyoming Statute 31-5-1106(a)] Officers should facilitate the exchange of information between drivers.
- C. Officers who investigate motor vehicle collisions should take enforcement action whenever a violation of law is believed to be a causative factor in a traffic crash, or when a driver is otherwise in violation of the law. Thorough investigations of traffic crashes are the responsibility of the officer and every effort should be made to determine causal factors and then take appropriate enforcement action. See Section 18.1.

18.2.4 Crash Investigation Follow-up

- A. Collecting off-scene data
 1. If immediate investigative duties at the crash scene prevented the thorough collection of evidence, the investigating officer will procure necessary items of evidence from damaged vehicles at the wrecker company as soon as possible following the incident.
 2. In alcohol/drug related crashes, the officer will obtain breath tests, blood samples, or utilize the assistance of a drug recognition expert.
 3. Collection of off-scene data or evidence may require a search warrant if the collection does not fall into one of the above mentioned categories. The prosecuting attorney's office should be consulted as appropriate for guidance.
- B. Obtaining and/or recording formal statements from witnesses

In crash investigations involving life-threatening injuries or fatalities, the investigating officer should obtain either a written or tape-recorded statement from all witnesses. This formal statement should be conducted at least several hours after the actual occurrence of the crash as the initial verbal statement may have been made during a highly stressful time.
- C. Advanced crash investigation
 1. In crashes resulting in life threatening injuries or in a fatality, an officer trained in advanced crash investigation techniques or crash reconstruction may be assigned to assist in the investigation.
 2. Reconstruction techniques may involve the use of large-scale diagrams, speed estimates derived from the application of mathematical formulas, technical examination of vehicle parts, and scientific experiments.
- D. Preparing formal reports

Crashes resulting in fatalities or life threatening injuries often require more than normal documentation. Besides the standard crash report form, the investigation may require other documents including, but not limited to, the following:

 1. Medical examiners report on cause of death;
 2. Statements of principals and witnesses;
 3. Interviews to determine driver activity prior to the crash;
 4. Measurement charts;
 5. Documentation of speed estimates;

6. Mathematical formulas and scale diagrams.
- E. Request for drivers' license reexamination
- Crash reporting, routine enforcement, and investigation activities may lead to the discovery of drivers who have a suspected incompetency, through physical or mental disability, disease or other condition, which might prevent the person from exercising reasonable care over a motor vehicle. Officers detecting such a person should request a re-examination by the Wyoming Department of Transportation.