

# **San Francisco Fire Department**

## **Division of Training**

Training Bulletin 22-7



## **Safe Vehicle Operations**

May 2022

## SAFE VEHICLE OPERATIONS TRAINING BULLETIN

### AND POST ACCIDENT TRAINING PROGRAM

The citizens of San Francisco place a special faith and confidence in their Fire Department. This trust has been earned from over 150 years of service, dedication to duty, and personal sacrifice. We must recognize that we serve in a position of public trust that requires stewardship in the efficient use of public resources, including the safe and proper use of emergency vehicles. Driving emergency vehicles is a significant responsibility. The welfare of your fellow firefighters, EMS personnel, those driving around you, and the citizens we are responding to for help all depend on you and your judgement to drive safely.

Chiefs, Officers, Rescue Captains, Drivers, and Tillers, EMTs and Paramedics all share responsibility for the safe operation of fire apparatus, Chiefs vehicles, and ambulances. The safety of pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and coworkers is at stake. There are many factors involved in the proper operation of emergency vehicles. Presented here are some core principles of safe emergency vehicle operation. For the safety of all involved, and for the good of the Department, SFFD members shall be familiar with these principles and apply them consistently. All SFFD Officers shall be held responsible for knowing them and enforcing their proper application.

1. **Attitude:** The apparatus operator must always keep the vehicle under control. A proper attitude is a key factor in doing so. Overconfidence, ignorance, self-righteousness, and impatience are all traits that contribute to faulty attitudes and lead to accidents. Drivers and Tillers should be cognizant to avoid them. If these faulty attitudes are displayed in conjunction with poor performance, Officers shall immediately address the situation, coach members to improve, and gain their compliance to improve.
  
2. **Speed:** Use of excessive speed while operating an emergency vehicle is a dangerous, and unacceptable practice. The key to a rapid response is responding out of the station in a timely manner, being familiar with the district, and knowing the most efficient and proper route. Aggressive driving, ignoring regulations, and violating speed limits pose unnecessary hazards to pedestrians, motorists, and coworkers. Officers shall not tolerate excessive speed and shall correct violations immediately. As a reminder, SFFD policy limits code 3 driving to a maximum speed of 35 MPH.
  
3. **Defensive Driving:** Apparatus drivers must always be on guard and expect the unexpected. They must know surrounding companies' normal routes of travel when responding to Boxes and anticipate meeting them at intersections. If there are clear pathways for other vehicles to subsequently enter the intersection after the apparatus, Drivers must be on guard and proceed defensively. They must anticipate other vehicles crossing their route of travel and the need to brake unexpectedly by having their foot "covering" the brake pedal when there is cross traffic or the potential for cross traffic. They must assume other drivers do not see or hear them. They must drive in a manner and speed that is appropriate for the location, traffic conditions, and time of day. Excessive speed, excessive use of horns and sirens, and tailgating or attempting to "force" another driver to grant them the right of way is being overly aggressive and unacceptable.

4. **Right-of-Way and Control of Intersections:** Department vehicles traveling code 3 must have control of ALL traffic intersections before safely passing through, regardless of traffic signal but especially against red lights, signals, or controls such as stop signs. This means the Driver must be certain that all other vehicles entering the intersection, from all directions, have stopped and explicitly granted the right of way to the department vehicle prior to the driver proceeding through the intersection. Often the explicit granting of right of ways is made by drivers making eye contact with each other. Apparatus operators cannot assume the right-of-way; they must always yield in the interest of safety. As a reminder, apparatus responding from multi-company stations should follow the same response route. This presents a special hazard at intersections because civilian drivers often expect only one emergency vehicle to pass before it is safe to proceed. Emergency vehicles following another apparatus should anticipate this situation as they approach intersections and proceed with extra caution.
  
5. **Vehicle Code Regulations and Your Liability:** As a Driver, Tiller, or Officer, you may be civilly and or criminally liable for an accident involving SFFD apparatus and civilian vehicles. The fire department may be vicariously liable through the actions of the Driver or Officer. Section 21056 of the California Vehicle Code states “drivers of emergency vehicles must operate with due regard for safety.” A primary factor for determining whether an emergency vehicle operator involved in an accident exercised due regard for safety can be made by evaluating what departmental Standard Operating Procedures were in place and whether any of them were violated. As a reminder, SFFD policies require that apparatus operators control intersections and adhere to the 35mph maximum speed. If an accident or injury occurs and vehicle code or departmental regulation was not followed, not only will Officers and Drivers be held responsible, but they may also be held civilly and/or criminally liable.
  
6. **The Role of Officers in Safe Vehicle Operations:** Company Officers bear responsibility for the safe operation of SFFD apparatus and should play an active role in managing the performance and conduct of Drivers or Tillers under their supervision. They shall accomplish this in part by explicitly communicating to Drivers and Tillers what their expectations are BEFORE anyone ever gets on the rig. These expectations shall be aligned with the California Vehicle Code and the Rules and Regulations of the SFFD, both of which are explained in detail in the SFFD Vehicle Operations Manual. There are many opportunities for Company Officers to be proactive in managing Drivers' and Tillers' performance. When an Officer and Driver are working together for the first time, the Officer should initiate a discussion at the beginning of the watch in which expectations are clearly stated regarding speed, seatbelt use, and control of intersections. When pulling out of the station the Officer and Driver should confer with each other to confirm a mutual understanding of the proper response route. While responding code 3, the Officer should continuously monitor street conditions, anticipate response routes of companies responding from other stations, and warn the Driver when those response routes are likely to meet each other at intersections. Particular attention should be given when a company is responding “AOR” as opposed to responding from quarters, as these rigs may not follow normal response routes. When approaching intersections, the Officer should visually scan the intersection and verbally identify for the Driver any pedestrians, bicyclists, uncontrolled lanes of traffic, or hazards. When returning to the station, do not allow complacency or inattention to cause unnecessary accidents. Minor accidents due to insufficient clearance, mirror to mirror accidents, and backing accidents are some of the most common and costly accidents in the

SFFD. Civilians and firefighters have been seriously injured or killed by backing fire apparatus. Officers are responsible for ensuring spotters are properly posted before backing up. The Vehicle Operations manual states that spotters must be positioned for any backing up of apparatus. This includes ambulances UNLESS patient care dictates otherwise. Street conditions for emergency vehicle drivers in San Francisco are some of the most challenging in the world. When Drivers and Tillers are doing a good job, Officers should give direct feedback to reinforce good performance. Conversely, when Drivers and or Tillers fail to meet expectations, Officers shall correct such performance through immediate feedback and coaching. If feedback and coaching do not achieve desired expectations and results, Drivers and or Tillers may be given a formal Documented Coaching, receive additional training, be placed on a Performance Improvement Plan, or referred to the Division of Training for remedial training. Drivers and or Tillers may also be subjected to being removed from their positions at any time an Officer deems their driving to be unsafe.

All members must take the time to review and discuss with each other the topics addressed in this training bulletin. For further reference, refer to the SFFD Vehicle Operations Manual and the SFFD Rules and Regulations.