



Orange County Emergency Services  
Standard Operating Guidelines

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SOG Name: Emergency Services Vehicle Operations

SOG Number: GEN 036

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**I. Objective:**

1. To create a standard for safe driving of all Emergency Services vehicles.
2. To create a vehicle operations standard that conforms to NC General Statutes related to the operation of a motorized, emergency vehicles

**II. Scope:**

1. This guideline applies to all Orange County Emergency Services staff and anyone operating an Orange County Emergency Services vehicle.

**III. Procedure:**

**1. Who may drive and/or operate OCES Vehicles?**

- a. Only providers properly trained and authorized shall drive and operate any vehicles owned by the County.
- b. To meet the requirements of the driver/operator you must have completed all requirements of the driver training SOG.
- c. All drivers must have a valid driver's license.

**2. Who may not drive and/or operate OCES Vehicles?**

- a. Providers who are convicted of a driving under the influence, reckless endangerment, or similar moving violation convictions within the past five years.
- b. Under the influence of any substance or impairment that interferes with the safe operation of the vehicle.

**3. Duties of the Driver**

- a. Prior to entering the cab and starting the vehicle, the emergency vehicle driver shall make a *circle of safety* around the vehicle to see that all equipment is secured, that all exterior compartment doors are securely closed and any physical obstructions are moved out of the way.

- b. While completing the circle of safety, the emergency vehicle driver shall encircle the vehicle and visually inspect all four sides and overhead clearance of the vehicle before entering the cab. The driver will also verify right side and rear clearance with the person riding in the navigator position. This shall be conducted prior to moving the vehicle regardless of whether or not the vehicle is about to respond to emergency or non-emergency calls.
- c. It shall be the duty of the driver to obtain the correct address before responding to a call/destination.
- d. The driver shall select the safest and quickest route to their destination.
- e. The driver of the vehicle shall not perform any function other than vehicle operation while the vehicle is in motion (includes the use of cellular phones, eating, drinking, reading map book or GPS, etc.) The only exception exists for radio use by the driver when a navigator is not present.
- f. All vehicles shall be operated in accordance with North Carolina General Statutes (CHAPTER 20) regarding emergency services response.
- g. Upon arrival on the emergency scene, the driver shall place the vehicle in a location best suited for safety, and quick ingress or egress to or from the scene.
- h. The driver, upon selecting a suitable location for the vehicle, shall set the emergency brake and any other safety features upon leaving the cab of the vehicle.

#### **4. Duties of Navigator Position**

- a. It shall be the duty of the navigator position to assist the driver with a safe response to the emergency scene.
- b. These duties include assisting with looking up response directions in the map book or in setting the GPS for the quickest route to the scene.
- c. The navigator shall watch for approaching traffic, communicate effectively to the driver, operate the radio, and operate audible warning devices. The audible warning devices include the siren and air horn (when necessary).

#### **5. Non-Emergency Response**

- a. When responding to a call non-emergency response, the vehicle will be operated without any audible or visual warning devices and in compliance with all state motor vehicle laws that apply to civilian traffic.
- b. Headlights will be on at all times when vehicle is in motion regardless of response mode.

## 6. Emergency Response

- a. Emergency driving is only allowed when a unit is dispatched to an incident in an emergency mode based on dispatch protocols, when a unit is transporting a patient and the medical condition dictates an emergency mode, or a unit's response is upgraded by a unit on scene or a medic based on additional information they have received.
- b. Operators will adhere to the response level assigned based on dispatch protocols unless changed by a supervisor or an on scene responder. EMS response mode may be downgraded as road conditions warrant with proper notification to Communications.
- c. When authorized to exceed speed limits, the speed of ambulances will not exceed 10 miles above the posted speed limits.
  1. Exceptions to speed limits will only be made while both audible and visible warning devices are being utilized.
  2. All vehicles will be driven with due regard for the safety of others and existing conditions.

## 7. Use of Emergency Lights and Siren

- a. When the vehicle is responding to an emergency as dictated by the nature of the response or the Emergency Medical Dispatch Protocol the response shall be made utilizing both visual and audible warning devices regardless of time of the day and/ or traffic conditions. These devices include flashing lights, headlights, and siren and air horn (when necessary).
- b. When operating emergency services vehicles, no duty rests on the other motorist to yield until proper warning by lights and sirens are given.
- c. NC General Statutes require the use of lights and sirens to lawfully exceed the posted speed limit and to take exception to right of way.
- d. All vehicles utilizing their emergency lights and audible devices shall immediately turn off the devices when directed by a supervisor, an on scene responder, Communications, Incident Commander, or senior staff member.
- e. The use of only visual warning devices is allowed while stationary at the scene to assist in illuminating such or adding an extra level of visibility for responders.

## 8. Approaching and traveling through intersection (Lights and Sirens)

- a. Extreme care should be taken when approaching any intersection, as intersections are the locations responsible for a large percentage of major accidents involving emergency vehicles.
- b. Any intersection controlled by a stop sign, yield sign, yellow traffic light, or a red light requires a **complete stop** by the emergency driver.
- c. In addition to bringing the vehicle to a complete stop, sound siren and air horn, and wait for all traffic to stop.

- d. Both the driver and navigator will look in all directions with the navigator calling a “clear right” prior to entry into the intersection.
- e. Should the intersection have multiple lanes, move to the left when possible.
- f. If the left lane is blocked and a right lane is the only opening, entry into the right lane is permitted, but only when ample warning has been given and the motorists have acknowledged the intended approach.
- g. When approaching grid locked intersections with no obvious egress through the intersection the driver will downgrade response and will wait for the intersection to clear before re-engaging audible warning devices.

#### **9. Passing another vehicle (Lights and Sirens)**

- a. When approaching a vehicle that will be passed, lights and sirens must be in operations.
- b. The pass should be made to the left of the vehicle.
- c. There may be traffic conditions that dictate a right hand pass and the driver will use extreme caution. This should be done only after the motorist that is to be overtaken acknowledges your intention to pass on the right.
- d. The driver of the emergency vehicle must be prepared to make safe and evasive action if the driver begins to yield right to the approaching emergency vehicle as dictated by statute.

#### **10. Crossing Medians**

- a. Vehicles shall not cross medians of highways unless the crossing can be done in a safe manner without damaging the vehicle.
- b. Traffic conditions, weather, the lack of barrier devices and geographic location shall dictate a safe crossing.

#### **11. Riding in Passenger Positions**

- a. Providers riding in the passenger positions shall remain seated and wear seatbelts while the vehicle is in motion with the only exception being for attendants providing care for the patient.
- b. Attendants should make all efforts to limit the amount of time they are unrestrained and will maximize efforts for restraint in the captain’s chair during transport.
- c. Patients shall be secured with appropriate stretcher restraints. Disposable straps are prohibited from use for the purpose of securing patients to the stretcher.
- d. Once the driver has set the parking brake, passengers may unbuckle their seat belts.
- e. All providers must be seated in approved riding positions and should be secured with seatbelts whenever the vehicle is in motion with the exception of the attendant in the commission of patient care.

- f. The driver will verify that all providers are properly seated and secured prior to vehicle motion.
- g. Riding on the tailboard, sidesteps, or any exposed position of the vehicle is prohibited.

#### **12. Backing Emergency Vehicles**

- a. It shall be the duty of the navigator to assist in the backing of the vehicle.
- b. At the signal of the driver, the navigator shall ensure that someone proceeds to rear of the vehicle and gives direction by hand signals to the driver that will assist in the safe backing of the vehicle.
- c. Other personnel shall remain seated during backing operations and until given the all clear from the driver.
- d. This will be done for all vehicles that are not small passenger vehicles.
- e. Use of backing devices such as cameras shall be used to assist in the process, but not used as the primary means to ensure a safe backing operation.

#### **13. Hazardous Weather**

- a. All drivers will take extra precautions to ensure safety of the driver, passengers, and other motorists.
- b. Under adverse weather conditions the EMS Shift Commander will activate the **Hazardous Driving Plan** (attached) requiring all EMS vehicles to operate in a non-emergent response mode.

#### **14. Vehicle Parking**

- a. Emergency Services vehicles shall not be parked in a marked handicapped spot.
- b. Emergency Services vehicles shall not be parked in fire lanes unless on an emergency call.
- c. Take care when parking Emergency Services vehicles on scene.
  - 1. Do not block roadways unless absolutely necessary.
  - 2. Pull into a driveway or completely off the roadway.
  - 3. Stage units with regard to other emergency vehicle ingress and egress needs.
- d. Designated parking spaces will be utilized while at Emergency Services Headquarters.
- e. Emergency Services vehicles shall park in designated areas at EMS stations.