

Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service FIRE CHIEF'S GENERAL ORDER

NUMBER: 25-05

May 8, 2025

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TO: All MCFRS Personnel

FROM: Fire Chief Corey A. Smedley *Corey Smedley*

SUBJECT: Risk-Based Approach to the Operation of MCFRS Vehicles

This FCGO replaces and rescinds Directive 04-21, MCFRS Safe Driving Action Plan

Background: The operations of MCFRS are not without risk. The aim of MCFRS is to reduce risk to the lowest achievable level. In general, MCFRS does this by instituting hazard controls and increasing capacity. Personnel are reminded that whether on an emergency response or during routine driving, effective service to our communities requires that we do no harm and that we are good stewards of the resources that we have been entrusted with.

Purpose: The purpose of this Fire Chief's General Order (FCGO) is to update the department with respect to a risk-based approach to the operation of MCFRS vehicles. This FCGO includes any vehicle, including boats, support vehicles, and unmanned aerial craft, regardless of the mode of travel, and regardless of the mode of response.

Direction:

- All personnel are, at least partially, responsible for the operation of vehicles to the extent that anyone witnessing an unsafe act is obligated to make their concern known to the operator or unit officer on the vehicle and are obligated to report occurrences of unsafe acts to their immediate supervisor.
- All personnel are responsible for ensuring that they are using all provided safety equipment, including seat belts, flotation devices, or other required equipment at all times, when the vehicle is being operated.
- The driver/operator of any vehicle is responsible for operating the vehicle in a way that reduces the likelihood of vehicle operation causing unacceptable risk to persons, animals, or property.
- Unit officers, regardless of rank, are the first level of oversight for drivers/operators, and are obligated to clearly communicate to the driver/operator whenever their operation of vehicle is imprudent.

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- Before operating a unit in reverse, the unit officer must be outside of the vehicle and is solely responsible for ensuring that there are no impediments to the operation of the vehicle. Further, the unit officer must deploy other personnel, as necessary and/or available, to account for hazards and prevent collisions.
- In those cases where there is no unit officer and the driver/operator must operate a vehicle in reverse, the driver/operator must first exit the vehicle, conduct a complete circle check of the vehicle to identify hazards, and only then move the vehicle in reverse.
- Drivers/operators must operate vehicles with due regard for the context of the operational environment and in such a way as to provide an adequate time or space buffer to prevent collisions or other damage to vehicles.
- Drivers/operators must not use handheld devices when operating vehicles except to the extent that such manipulation is necessary for navigation or tactical communication. The determination that such a use of devices is necessary does not absolve the driver/operator of responsibility for avoiding a collision via the safe operation of the vehicle.
- Drivers/operators must not use highway turnarounds or cut throughs for any reason unless the intended side of the roadway are at a complete stop and under the positive control of an agent with sufficient authority to have the roadway closed.

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- Drivers/operators must not stop on divided highways with the intent to cross medians, guardrails, or similar objects, on foot, in order to access an emergency scene, unless both sides of the roadway are at a complete stop and under the positive control of an agent with sufficient authority to have the roadway closed.
- Drivers/operators operating on roadways must obey posted speed limits during routine driving.
- Drivers/operators operating on roadways may exceed posted speed limits by a reasonable amount during emergency responses, but only to the extent that they are able to remain in control of the vehicle and stop the vehicle on the roadway without impacting any objects should those objects enter the travel path of the vehicle. Driver/operators exceeding the posted speed limit are accountable to the “deliberate, defensible, communicated” operational framework.
- Drivers/operators operating on roadways must come to a complete stop at all stop signs, red lights, or in the presence of any other sign, posting, or indication that a full stop is required. The vehicle may only proceed after a complete stop.
- During patient transport, driver/operators of EMS units must only use red lights and sirens when in accordance with the latest MCFRS Office of Medical Oversight Clinical Practice Guideline regarding patient transport.