

Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service

DIVISION OF OPERATIONS DIRECTIVE

NUMBER: 10-15

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TO: All Operations Division Personnel

FROM: Division Chief Steve Lohr 

SUBJECT: Guidelines for the Use of All-Wheel Drive Pumpers, Brush Trucks, and ATVs

The purpose of this Directive is to provide guidelines regarding the appropriate use of all-wheel drive (AWD) pumpers, brush trucks, and ATVs for off-road incidents. Demand for all-wheel drive vehicles typically occurs off paved roads, or on trails, tow-paths, or other areas where access may be unsuitable for heavy vehicles that are designed to be used on paved roads. Also, AWD vehicles often are used during various types of stormy weather, including snow, ice, high water, and other inclement weather events.

For several reasons, it is rarely appropriate to take a structural pumper, tanker, or aerial off a hard-surfaced road. First and foremost, these units are too heavy; they are equipped with highway tread tires, and have low ground clearance. They lose traction when they are inappropriately deployed off hard-surfaced roads; become disabled and are unnecessarily damaged; and pumpers leak water under the unit while they are pumping, further softening the ground.

Some LFRDs and Station Officers have provided specific guidelines regarding deploying resources that are not available in every station. ECC has problems with these dispatches, since CAD call types and response plans are generic, and *cannot* be individualized by station. Station Officers become frustrated because the structural pumper is *always* recommended in CAD, and is dispatched even though a unit that is designed and built for off-road use may be available and is considered a better choice. As a result, many company officers choose to take *only* the apparatus as dispatched. However, ECC *does support* the post-dispatch deployment of AWD assets as a station-level decision. To facilitate these decisions, on-duty station officers must consider the "best practice" guidelines offered below.

1. Take or request an AWD vehicle for fires and rescues to *known locations*, where you expect crews will need to leave the roadway by a distance greater than any reasonable “made-up” supply or attack line. These are usually brush, field, hay bales, or other vegetation fires; debris or illegal fires in remote locations; and EMS incidents where patient(s) are likely to be transported a distance greater than crews can be expected to carry someone on a stretcher.
2. The AWD drive pumpers available at FS09, FS13, FS14, and FS17 may *replace* the structural pumper, *or may be added to response plans* at the discretion of the company officer or Incident Commander, as needed. *ECC cannot modify response plans in CAD before dispatch, but must be notified, and will manually adjust the units assigned to the incident.*
3. Personnel may take structural pumpers off road **only** if the risk/benefit analysis requires that action. In many locations, the structural pumper may be the *only* resource available and *should* respond. However, this does not mean that personnel should *inappropriately* take it off-road when other, *more suitable resources are available*. If this occurs, the unit officer has several alternatives:
 - a. stretching a line(s) to the fire from the hard-surface road, if possible;
 - b. requesting additional resources to mitigate the incident; or
 - c. taking an AWD asset *in addition to, or in place of* the structural pumper, if your station houses one.

Station Officers and LFRD Chiefs must ensure that their respective personnel are properly trained and certified to operate the AWD units assigned to their station. To facilitate the use of the appropriate apparatus where an alternative is available, *all structural pumper drivers should be cross-trained on the available AWD assets in their respective stations. Also, FFIIIs and FFIIIIs who meet minimum experience and qualifications should be trained on light duty brush trucks where possible.*

Using off-road vehicles when appropriate will reduce the occurrence of damage to units that are *not designed* for off-road function, and ensure that incidents are mitigated as efficiently as possible.

Please refer any specific training questions to the PSTA Driver Training Coordinator.