

**THE
CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
CITIZENS POLICE OVERSIGHT COMMISSION
PPD POLICY TRANSLATION FOR PUBLIC REVIEW**



Title: Vehicular Accidents	Type of Report: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Final <input type="checkbox"/> Supplemental
Type of Report: Vehicular Accidents Explainer	CPOC File Number: N/A

A motor vehicular accident is defined as any accident involving a motor vehicle which results in bodily injury to any person, or damage to the property of any person. Vehicular accidents are experienced nationwide. Section 3751 of Title 75, Pennsylvania’s Consolidated Statutes (Vehicle Code), requires law enforcement in all cities, including Philadelphia, to investigate vehicular accidents which involve a death, injury, and damage where the car cannot be driven without more damage; and as a result, the car requires towing.¹ Crashes involving minor injury and property damage may be investigated by patrol personnel.

According to PennDOT’s traffic accident report, Philadelphia is one of the ten highest counties where vehicular crashes occur. Additionally, due to the crashes, there were traffic related fatalities where Philadelphia reported the highest number of fatalities. Philadelphia reported 8,741 crashes in 2022 with 143 fatalities.² The Philadelphia Police Department (PPD) is responsible for responding to crashes in Philadelphia. This document seeks to inform citizens on what to expect when they report crashes to PPD.

It is important to understand the types of vehicular crashes and their causes. Additionally, citizens should understand how to report crashes, and the responsibilities of responding law enforcement. This assists in preventing crashes and evaluating factual information listed on report forms when determining if any violations occurred.

Vehicular Crashes³

According to PPD Directive 9.6, all vehicular crashes are investigated and documented electronically through the Traffic Criminal Software System (TraCS System). The TraCS System is a software program which allows for the electronic creation of Crash Reports, both reportable and non-reportable, along with traffic citations.

The Crash Reports replaced the paper forms “AA-500” and “75-48C” which were previously used. The TraCS system communicates data between PPD servers, Municipal Traffic Court, and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT). Crash reports are completed, approved, and submitted within five calendar days after being reported to PPD.

¹ Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), Police Officers Crash Report Manual, 1, <https://www.penndot.pa.gov/TravelInPA/Safety/Documents/Pub153.pdf>

² PennDOT, 2022 Pennsylvania Crash Facts & Statistics, 59-61, https://www.penndot.pa.gov/TravelInPA/Safety/Documents/2022_CFB_linked.pdf.

³ PPD Directive 9.6, August 20, 2021, 2-4, <https://www.phillypolice.com/assets/directives/D9.6-VehicularAccidents.pdf>.

An “Application to Obtain Copy of Police Crash Report” is provided to operators of the vehicles involved when the crash report is prepared. The reports are not printed by police personnel for distribution; however, the applications to obtain the reports should be submitted to the following:

Records Department
City Hall Room 170
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Additional information regarding the applications can also be obtained at the [City of Philadelphia’s Department of Records Homepage](#).

***Note: There is a \$25 fee for all records requests**

Reportable Vs. Non-Reportable Crashes⁴

Reportable Crashes

PPD policy defines reportable accidents as crashes which require an investigation by a police officer involving the following:

- Injury to or death of any person; or
- Damage to any vehicle involved to the extent that it cannot be driven under its own power in its customary manner and therefore requires towing (excluding flat tires).

Non-Reportable Crashes

Non-reportable accidents include all other vehicle crashes in which death or injury of any person, or towing does not occur. Additionally, if the crash occurred on private property and was intentional, it is non-reportable.

Crash Types

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation identified various crash types.⁵ A description which characterizes the crash type is described as one of the following below:

- **Non-Collision:** A harmful incident that does not involve a collision. These incidents include explosion, fire, overturn, immersion, and vehicle struck by flying object.
- **Angle:** A crash in which two vehicles on opposite roadways collide at a point of junction, such as a road intersection, driveway, or entrance ramp.
- **Rear-End:** A crash in which vehicles traveling in the same direction, on the same road, collide (vehicle front into vehicle rear).
- **Head-On:** A crash in which vehicles traveling in opposite directions, on the same road, collide (vehicle front into vehicle front).
- **Sideswipe:** A crash between two vehicles (traveling in the same direction or opposite direction) in which the sides of both vehicles engage.
- **Hit Fixed Object:** A collision in which a vehicle collides with stationary object(s) along and adjacent to the roadway, (i.e. bridge piers, trees, utility poles, embankment, guiderail, etc).
- **Hit Pedestrian:** A collision between a motor vehicle and any person(s) not in or upon the vehicle.

⁴ PPD Directive 9.6, August 20, 2021, 3-4, <https://www.phillypolice.com/assets/directives/D9.6-VehicularAccidents.pdf>

⁵ 2022 Pennsylvania Crash Facts & Statistics, 4.

Crashes, Fatalities, and Injuries – Five Year Trends⁶

According to statistics from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, most crashes are not fatal. However, various injuries arise. Investigations occur to determine what caused the crash and whether any criminal violations may have caused the crash or the injuries.

In 2022, there was a 1.7% decrease in total reported crashes in Pennsylvania compared to 2021. Fatalities dropped by 4.1% and total injuries decreased by 3.7%.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Reported Crashes	128,420	125,267	104,475	117,899	115,938
Total Fatalities	1,190	1,059	1,129	1,230	1,179
Total Injuries	78,219	76,243	61,248	69,599	67,012
<i>Suspected Serious Injury</i>	4,534	4,680	4,436	5,122	4,751
<i>Suspected Minor Injury</i>	33,551	35,539	30,727	35,412	34,894
<i>Possible Injury</i>	17,290	15,188	10,745	12,448	11,629
<i>Unknown Severity</i>	22,844	20,836	15,340	16,617	15,738
Pedestrian Fatalities	201	154	146	182	184
Pedestrian Injuries	4,090	4,099	2,788	3,053	3,160
Motorcyclist Fatalities	164	174	217	226	217
Motorcyclist Injuries	2,611	2,860	3,227	3,361	3,148
Bicyclist Fatalities	18	16	22	24	15
Bicyclist Injuries	962	1,003	799	754	801
Heavy-Truck-Related Fatalities	136	128	122	156	164
Alcohol-Related Fatalities	331	299	293	311	320
Speed-Related Fatalities	280	264	269	285	268
Billions of Vehicle-Miles*	101.6	102.1	102.8	85.3	102.7
Deaths per 100 Million Vehicle-Miles*	1.17	1.04	1.10	1.44	1.15

*Vehicle mileage uses the prior years' vehicle mileage information (because at the time of publication, the current year's vehicle mileage is not available).

PPD Responsibilities⁷

As accidents and crashes occur, PPD plays a crucial role. It is important to understand what caused a crash to prevent additional events from occurring and to determine if there were any criminal violations.

Once a vehicular accident report is received, police radio will determine the appropriate categorization and assignment priority according to policies and procedures. A police vehicle is dispatched to the scene of the accident along with a “rotational tow” by police radio. The responding officer will examine the situation to determine if the rotational tow is required. If the dispatched tow is not required, the dispatcher will follow standard operating procedures to cancel the request.

A rotational towing system is a method of selecting a towing company from an authorized list for the purpose of towing a vehicle from one point to another. This is a regulated service contracted through the City of Philadelphia. Once the assignment is made, that towing company rotates to the bottom of the list. Towing from the scene of an accident where police have been, should only include persons selected through operation of the AutoReturn rotational system.

⁶ 2022 Pennsylvania Crash Facts & Statistics, 8.

⁷ PPD Directives 9.6 and 12.5, <https://www.phillypolice.com/assets/directives/>

This does not apply to roadways patrolled by the Pennsylvania State Police or City-owned vehicles requiring towing (both Police and non-police city vehicles). The vehicles are towed according to policies and procedures of the relevant city agency.

PPD policies state that the responding officer to a vehicular accident uses caution and ensures the scene is safe before aiding any injured parties. Police Radio is then notified of the accident scene, including injuries and traffic disruptions, along with requests for Fire Department and Rescue if required. Subsequently, the officer advises Police Radio whether any dispatched rotational tow is needed or may be cancelled.

If the tow is required, the identity of the towing company is verified to confirm they were dispatched, an inventory is conducted, and the condition and contents of the vehicle are documented in the report. All contents remain with the vehicle.

Vehicles involved in the accident should be relocated as soon as possible to allow traffic to flow safely. However, the vehicles should remain in the position following the accident as long as possible, to allow officers to conduct a thorough investigation. If it is necessary to remove the vehicle due to a delay in traffic, the road should be marked for investigators.

Traffic citations are issued as warranted. These citations are issued based on what an officer or witness may have observed, or speed-timing equipment.

Vehicular Accident Investigations⁸

PPD Directive 9.6 states that the following divisions are responsible for investigating accidents:

- *The Crash Investigation District (CID) (former name - Accident Investigation District (AID)) investigates:*
 - Fatal accidents;
 - Serious injury accidents (determined by a CID Supervisor);
 - An auto vs. pedestrian accident in which the pedestrian is under the age of 18 years (as determined by a CID Supervisor);
 - Damage to City property (determined by a CID Supervisor);
 - All accidents involving City vehicles. This includes all vehicles assigned a property number, leased/rented vehicles, and forfeiture vehicles;
 - All privately-owned vehicles being used for official City business;
 - Accidents involving violations of Sections 3742, 3743, and 3745 MVC (as determined by a CID Supervisor); and
 - Hazardous material carriers involved in a vehicle crash when a chemical release occurs.
- *The Detective Division of Occurrence and/or the Homicide Unit will investigate (CID assisted) accidents which are suspected to be the result of a deliberate act or suicide.*
- *The Homicide Unit, Crime Scene Unit, and/or the Detective Division of Occurrence will assist CID in the investigation of vehicle crashes, whenever necessary.*

Outside Police Agencies⁹

⁸ PPD Directive 9.6, 7-8.

⁹ PPD Directive 9.6, 3.

In addition to PPD, outside law enforcement agencies that operate in Philadelphia are authorized to respond to accidents and prepare reports which happened in their jurisdiction. Some of these agencies include SEPTA and University Police Departments. When preparing accident reports which require interaction with PPD (i.e., driving under the influence crashes), they must obtain a Philadelphia District Control Number from the district where the accident occurred and provide a copy of the report to the district. While these agencies are allowed to respond to accidents and prepare reports, they are not permitted to access the TraCS system maintained by PPD.

Crashes – Property Damage Only¹⁰

According to PPD policies and procedures, vehicle crashes which result in property damage only, do not require dispatching of law enforcement. Officers are only required to respond to the following incidents:

- Personal injury
- Any vehicle damaged to the extent that it cannot be operated on its own without towing
- The vehicle was operated by a person suspected of Driving Under the Influence (DUI)
- City-owned/leased vehicle
- Property damage involves city, state, or federal property
- Vehicle involved is carrying hazardous materials
- Any person involved fled the scene or refuses to cooperate in the exchange of information

There are two options for a person involved in a property damage only accident to report the crash to the PPD. The involved parties may go in person to the Police District of occurrence to report the incident or they may contact the District by telephone to report the details of the accident. The District must accept a crash report by phone and shall not refuse to take the call. Each report shall include how the information was obtained whether phone or walk-in.

Vehicle crashes can be devastating and are unfortunate. The valuable information reported to law enforcement regarding a vehicle crash is vital in preventing future accidents and determining any criminal violations. The reports provide statistics regarding vehicle crashes. Understanding the investigation process, including reportable and non-reportable accidents and police reports may bring some relief to the unfortunate incidents which occur.

Questions?

The mission of the CPOC is to review the policies, practices, and customs of the PPD, and help improve the relationship between the community and the police. The CPOC is always available to accept complaints and comments through our website, <http://www.phila.gov/CPOC>. Please contact us online or by phone, at (215) 685-0891 if you have any questions or concerns about this topic of vehicular accidents or any other policing-related topic.

¹⁰ PPD Directive 9.6, 14-15.