

Effect of Drivers Training on Police Duty

Related Injuries and Deaths

Sergeant Fred Yono

ABSTRACT

This research project will show how drivers training can reduce the amount of officer injuries and deaths. Driving is one of the most neglected areas of training in law enforcement. We have grown up with the automobile. Most people started driving at an early age with little or no formal training. We take the ability to drive for granted and because of this attitude, police officers apply their everyday driving skills to emergency driving conditions with negative results.

This research project reviewed current literature on the effect of training on officer involved traffic crashes. An informal survey was sent to ten (10) local police departments. Three (3) departments responded. A review of the types of drivers training available was conducted, with the good and bad points of each.

The results of the study support the original thesis that drivers training provided during the academy and at periodical intervals during the officers' career can reduce officer involved crashes, thereby reducing officer injuries and deaths.

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INTRODUCTION

Driving is one of the most dangerous activities that officers engage in everyday, yet it is the most neglected area when it comes to training. Most officers receive extensive training in the use of firearms and defensive tactics and are required to qualify at least annually with both their duty and off duty weapon and take and pass at least one defensive tactics class in order to be certified to work as a patrolman. These same officers are only given a week long drivers training course in the academy and if they receive refresher drivers training, it is usually minimal. These officers may never draw their weapon, but the majority of their duties involve driving in all kinds of weather and traffic conditions, with the added distractions of the police radio, radar unit, as well as watching everything that is going on around him/her.

This study will review current drivers training practices of police agencies and how these practices affect the rate of chargeable crashes resulting in property damage as well as officer injury and/or death. The research for this project will include review of current literature, training policies from numerous agencies and a survey of local police department driving practices and procedures in Wayne County, Michigan.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Police officers are responding to an increasing number of calls for service, in increasingly congested traffic and weather conditions. Statistics show that traffic crashes are the leading cause of injury to police officers and the second leading cause of on-duty deaths.(1)

The officer responds in one of two modes either Non-Emergency/normal traffic mode or emergency mode. In the Non-Emergency/normal traffic mode, the officer is obeying the traffic laws but is still distracted by the police radio, radar unit, laptop computer and observing all that is going on around him/her. It is in this mode that most at fault (chargeable) crashes occur. This is due to the many distractions that an officer faces while driving. The officer, responding in the Emergency mode, still has an obligation to drive with regard to the safety of others, even though he/she has the right to violate the rules of the road. Many times, while operating in the Emergency mode, the officer can get tunnel vision. Concentrating on the road ahead and not see hazards coming from the side. The officer can also overdrive both his/her limitations as well as the limitations of the vehicle. Requiring officers to participate in a drivers' training program, although not a cure all, can reduce officer involved crashes. Many police departments fail to train for numerous reasons. The largest reason being lack of available funding to pay for the training including such items as, instructors salaries, officers overtime and training supplies.

Another consideration is the lack of training facilities. Drivers training, to be effective needs to subject the trainee to the various weather conditions, traffic conditions and hazards that the officer will encounter in his/her day to day activities. Facilities available to meet these requirements are very limited and can be expensive. In order for the training to be effective, the officers also have to train in the vehicles that they will be using in their daily activities. The officers have to learn their own limitations as well as the limitations of the vehicle that they are driving. This will produce additional wear and tear on the department's vehicles, requiring additional maintenance and shorter vehicle life span.

The argument for providing adequate drivers training is first and foremost, increased officer safety, resulting in fewer officer injuries and deaths. The United States Supreme Court has made it clear that policymakers have an obligation to review the daily activities potential constitutional violations are addressed with training programs (City of Canton, Ohio v Geraldine Harris, 489 U.S. 378 (1989)). To not do so, according to the court, is to be deliberately indifferent to any potential constitutional violations. (2) This is very true in the daily operation of a police patrol vehicle. The cost of one civil liability suit for the negligent use of a motor vehicle, can far out weight the cost of training.

In order for the training to be effective, it must address both non-emergency and emergency driving conditions. Training must also address the basic skills of driving, such as the use of turn signals, headlights, and horn. Vehicle operation is a psychomotor skill. These skills must be taught and will diminish without practice. That is why in service refresher training is also essential. This in service training must be conducted at least every two (2) years, or sooner if an officer is involved in an at fault crash.

Types of Training

There are numerous types of drivers training available for the police officer. These can be broken down into the classroom, hands on range driving (using a patrol vehicle), simulator (such as skid-car tm), and computer based simulators (such as I-Sim tm).

All of the above have been shown to be effective. The combination using portions of all 4 can be the most effective, but can be very expensive. The combination of classroom training and range driving is the most cost effective. The officers spend three to four hours in the classroom, learning the basics of vehicle dynamics such as skid control and recovery techniques, controlled braking (anti-lock braking and threshold braking) and the physiological and psychological effects of emergency driving. These skills are then reinforced on the driving range, using the officer's assigned vehicle or the same type of vehicle the officer drives on his normal shift. On the driving range, the instructor can put the officer under some of the same stress and pressure that the officer will encounter during real life situations.

The officer will learn the dynamics of the vehicle and the limitations of that vehicle.

The Skid-Car simulator uses the same type of vehicle that the officer normally uses during his/her shift, mounted on a platform of mechanical and hydraulic components that look like a giant set of training wheels. The instructor can raise or lower the vehicle using a handheld hydraulic actuator control device. This results in an increase or decrease in the amount of traction and thus control that the driver experiences. The training is conducted at low speeds (usually 5 to 10 miles per hour). The trainee is able to feel the dynamics of the skid as it occurs because of the relatively low speeds. This is a fairly expensive system, starting at \$45,000.00 for each system or type of vehicle in the police

departments fleet.

The computerized Law Enforcement Driving Simulator system uses a system much like that used to train pilots. The officer can experience the consequences of driving decisions made while driving in the emergency mode, without the risks associated with actual range driving. The simulator can concentrate on judgement/decision making skills.

Scenarios can be developed which address agency priorities and recreate actual incidents.

One problem with the computer simulator is disorientation. The disorientation comes from the mixed signals being received by brain from the body. The inner ear is telling the brain that the body is not moving, while the eyes are telling the brain that the body is in motion. This can be overcome with training.

The Skid-car™ nor the driving simulator are meant to replace in-vehicle training. They are meant to augment an existing in vehicle training program. The air line and military have used simulators to improve the skills of its personell while saving millions of dollars in lost time, damaged or destroyed equipment through accidents. All of the training methods have there good and bad points. The bottom line is that some type of training is better than no training. Any of the above training methods can and do save lives and reduce injuries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are numerous articles published concerning drivers training for police officers, citing the positive effect training has on the reduction of officer injuries and deaths as well as liability for the department.

The FBI Law enforcement Bulletin featured an article titled “Accidentally Dead: Accidental Line-of-Duty Deaths of Law Enforcement Officers”. This article states “that statistics reflect these types (vehicle accidents) of accidental deaths are increasing throughout the United States. In the past two decades, 1,407 officers have died feloniously in the United States while 1,362 officers have died accidentally. However, in 1998, a startling change in this trend began to emerge. The number of accidental line-of-duty deaths surpassed the number of officers killed by felons. A dramatic shift in 1998 showed that 20 more officers died in accidents (81) than due to criminal action (61). This climb continued in 1999 with 23 more officers dying accidentally (65 to 42) and culminated in 2000 with 33 more officers losing their lives in accidents than in felonious incidents (84 to 51).”

The article concludes with “ Everyone within the law enforcement community hopes that the day will arrive when felonious killings, serious assaults, and accidental deaths are only a part of law enforcement’s history. However, realistically, the profession accepts the sad, but inevitable, reality that deaths and assaults will continue to occur. Although they may continue, law enforcement agencies, local governments, civic groups, and academic institutions can work toward reducing their number by analyzing past incidents, developing new training procedures, and reminding officers of the dangers inherent in the profession.” (2002)

Many articles deal with a particular type of training. An article in the December 2001 issue of Law and Order on using the SkidCar training simulator as a training tool states that “SkidCar training is based on the premise that the driver will put a vehicle into situations that will subject it to physical forces, leaving the driver to exercise sound judgement to lower risk while maximizing behind the wheel skills. While some driver training programs focus on teaching a driver new or refined motor skills. SkidCar teaches drivers how to think.”

An article in Police Chief Magazine deals with the computer based driving simulators. The article states “Driving is one of the most dangerous responsibilities police officers have. Officers are sent to navigate throughout a civilian populace with little more than “hard track” training and reliance upon perishable driving skills that they learned while teenagers. Consequently, driving related incidents account for a manority of police officers’ injuries and deaths. Everyday, the media highlights a new tragedy involving police officers.

The Police Chief article continues “ Almost all driving situations that officers encounter while on patrol are too dangerous to train for with real vehicles. Examples include driving to avoid bicycle riders, pedestrians, animals, and on-coming vehicles. These are situations that expose officers and civilians to unacceptable risks. This is especially true when an officer is fueled by adrenaline during a high-risk patrol, pursuit, or a code-3 interaction. A simulator provides sfety from liability and danger while building transferable training experience. (2000)

An Article in Sheriff Magazine addresses the benefits of the computer based I-Sim driver training system. The article states that “ The simulator has several advantages over

traditional test-track training: bad weather does not mean that driving class must be cancelled. Inclement weather can in fact be simulated for training purposes. Drivers can be subjected to hazards that are too dangerous to replicate in actual driving, even on a test track. There is no pollution and no fuel is used-an increasingly important factor given today's soaring fuel prices. There is no wear and tear on patrol cars, and the mobile system can be moved to any substation in the county, cutting deputies travel time and down time." (2002)

These are just a few of the numerous articles published concerning police officer line-of-duty injuries and deaths.

PROCEDURES

The research for this project was conducted by reviewing current articles from major law enforcement magazines dealing with officer line-of-duty injuries and deaths and drivers training methods. The internet was used as a resource to find articles and research that had been conducted by other groups focusing on police officer injuries and deaths.

An informal survey (appendices A, B, and C) was conducted using local police departments. A review of police department policies and procedures was conducted to determine the departments policy regarding drivers training and the operation of emergency vehicles. (see appendix D)

All of these methods were combined to complete this project.

Survey Results

An informal survey was sent out to 10 area departments. Three departments responded.

See attachments A, B, C.

All three departments stated that they provide precision refresher drivers training for their officers. All three responding departments stated that they provide both the classroom and the range course to enhance their officer's driving ability.

When asked if the number of officer involved crashes decreased following drivers training, one department stated that it was unknown, as they did not keep statistics, one department stated that the number rose and one department had a dramatic decrease in the number of officer involved crashes. This study was an unscientific study without conclusive results.

The Van Buren Township Police Department started refresher drivers training in 1995. Prior to providing the training, the department averaged 10 to 12 officer at fault accidents per year. After requiring the training the average dropped to 2 at fault accidents per year. The officers interviewed after the training stated that it made them more aware of the handling limitations of the vehicle as well as their personal limitations, such as tunnel vision.

The San Antonio, Texas police department purchased an I-Sim™ in 2000. The simulator was meant to augment their training program by allowing their officers to practice different driving scenarios without injuring themselves or damaging vehicles. In 1999 between January and June the departments' officers were involved in 58 intersection accidents. In the same period in 2000 (after training in the driving simulator) intersection

accidents dropped to 15. A 75% reduction. 3

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drivers' training does work to reduce officer's involvement in traffic crashes.

The training must be a hands on combination of classroom and range driving. This training must be realistic and teach the officer not only vehicle dynamics, but his/her personal limitations and strengths in driving an emergency vehicle. The training must be reoccurring, to reinforce the psychomotor driving skills that are lost if not used.

There also needs to be policy that, if an officer is involved in an at fault motor vehicle crash, that officer will participate in a remedial drivers training program addressing the factors that contributed to the officers' crash.

The Greenville, South Carolina Police Department has established a Safety Review Board tasked with reviewing Automobile collisions and related incidents. Personal injuries and related incidents, any safety related incidents and police department policies and procedures dealing with employee safety. This review process is meant to reduce or at best prevent vehicle accidents. Personal injuries and identify any existing condition which may effect the safety of department personnel.

The combination of policies and procedures requiring refresher drivers training, an accident review board and an effective training program will reduce officer injuries and deaths due to vehicle crashes.

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Stockton, D, Innovative Driver training with SkidCar, Law and Order December 2001

Appendix A

The Township of Van Buren Department of Public Safety



KENNETH A. BROOKS
LIEUTENANT
POLICE DIVISION



ALLEN M. SMOLEN
EPUTY DIRECTOR
FIRE DIVISION

June 12, 2003

I am Sgt Fred Yono and am doing a thesis on the effects of refresher precision drivers training on reducing injuries and deaths in officer related traffic crashes. I would greatly appreciate it, if you would answer the following questions regarding your drivers training and officer involved traffic crashes. Please return the answers to me in the enclosed self addressed stamped envelope thank you for your assistance..

1. Does your department provide refresher precision drivers training for your officers?

Yes

If the answer to the above is YES please answer the following seven (7) questions. If the answer is NO please skip to question 9.

2. What type of refresher training is provided? (just classroom, just hands on or both) class room and hands on not since Sept.11, 2001

3. How often does an officer go through refresher training? (annually, semi-annually etc.)
Annually

4. What is the length of the refresher course? (one day; two days. etc.)

2 day

5. When did your department start to provide refresher training? (1990 etc.)

1988

6. Did your department experience a reduction in chargeable accidents; a reduction in officer injuries or deaths after you started refresher training? Unk

7. How many officer involved crashes did your department have before starting refresher training? Unk

8. How many officer involved crashes has your department had since starting refresher training? Unk

46425 TYLER - VAN BUREN TOWNSHIP, MI 48111
PHONE: 734.699.8930 - FAX: 734.699.6082
www.vanburen-mi.org

If the answer to question 1 is NO. Please answer the following questions.

9. How many officer involved crashes does your department have per year?

10. How many of those assign a hazardous action to the officer involved?

11. Did the officer involved have drivers training in the academy?

12. Did the officer involved ever have any type of drivers training? If so what type and how long prior to the crash?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

If the answer to question 1 is NO. Please answer the following questions.

9. How many officer involved crashes does your department have per year?

10. How many of those assign a hazardous action to the officer involved?

11. Did the officer involved have drivers training in the academy?

12. Did the officer involved ever have any type of drivers training? If so what type and how long prior to the crash?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Appendix C

The Township of Van Buren Department of Public Safety



KENNETH A. BROOKS
LIEUTENANT
POLICE DIVISION



ALLEN M. SMOLEN
EPUTY DIRECTOR
FIRE DIVISION

June 12, 2003

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1. Does your department provide refresher precision drivers training for youofficers? *YES*

If the answer to the above is YES please answer the following seven (7) questions. If the answer is NO please skip to question 9.

2. What type of refresher training is provided? (just classroom, just hands on or both)

Both

3. How often does an officer go through refresher training? (annually, semi-annually, etc) *Semi-annually*

4. What is the length of the refresher course? (one day; two days. etc.) *one day*

5. When did your department start to provide refresher training? (1990 etc.) *1994*

6. Did your department experience a reduction in chargeable accidents; a reduction in officer injuries or deaths after you started refresher training? *Yes*

7. How many officer involved crashes did your department have before starting refresher training? *7 the prior year*

8. How many officer involved crashes has your department had since starting refresher training? *0-95, 4-96, 4-97, 3-98, 7-99, 9-01, 6-02*

46425 TYLER • VAN BUREN
TOWNSHIP, MI 48111 PHONE:
734.699.8930 • FAX:
734.699.6082 www.vanburen-mi.org

If the answer to question 1 is NO. Please answer the following questions.

9. How many officer involved crashes does your department have per year?

10. How many of those assign a hazardous action to the officer involved?

11. Did the officer involved have drivers training in the academy?

12. Did the officer involved ever have any type of drivers training? If so what type and how long prior to the crash?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Appendix D

Number: 2017

Supersedes:

Approved By:

Date Revised:

Effective Date:

These guidelines are provided to assist members of the Tulsa Police Department, to improve police service, and to enhance safety for officers and citizens. It is recognized that not every circumstance can be anticipated. Many situations will require discretion and, at times, deviation from the basic guidelines.

LAW ENFORCEMENT DRIVING

Objective:

To enhance officer safety as it pertains to law enforcement driving.

Operational Guidelines:

As urban populations have increased over the last decade, so too has the public's demand for police services. Those services can not be provided, however, unless officers safely respond to the situation. Safe driving is, therefore, a primary concern of all law enforcement agencies.

Driving a police vehicle is inherently dangerous. The driver's attention is frequently diverted to such things as responding to the police radio and the pursuit of traffic violators. These distractions increase the possibility of officer involved traffic collisions.

Statistics show that traffic collisions are the leading cause of injury to police officers and the second leading cause of on-duty deaths. Officers must maintain an awareness of these issues and practice safe driving techniques to form proper driving habits.

Non-Emergency Driving

Driving to non-emergency calls and routine patrol driving produce the vast majority of "at fault" collisions. Many collisions occur due to a lack of attention. Officers should avoid diverting their attention to a single object (tunnel vision) and instead concentrate on their entire surroundings.

- **Laptop Terminal:**

As officers obtain laptop terminals, the potential for diverted attention increases. Officers must keep their attention on the road and be extremely careful while using the laptop terminal. If using the laptop compromises safe driving, it should not be used until the vehicle is stationary.

Emergency Driving

State law gives peace officers the privilege of violating the rules of the road in order to respond to an emergency call or when in the pursuit of an actual or suspected violator of the law. This does not relieve the driver of an authorized emergency vehicle from the duty to drive with due regard for the safety of all persons. Officers should understand that it may be necessary to stop or yield to other vehicles even though their emergency equipment is activated.

Emergency Equipment:

Officers must utilize both lights *and* siren prior to violating the rules of the road. Factors such as inclement weather, residential areas, and tall buildings can reduce the effectiveness of emergency equipment. During the day, citizens may have difficulty seeing the emergency lights. The effectiveness of the siren decreases as the speed of the emergency vehicle increases.

Pursuit Driving

Operating a law enforcement vehicle in a pursuit situation is a highly stressful and demanding experience that has unique responsibilities and critical decision-making requirements. Officers should ensure that stress does not cause faulty judgment. The safety of citizens is always an officer's first priority during a pursuit. The necessity of apprehension must outweigh the degree of danger created by the pursuit. Sound pursuit strategies will reduce the potential for collisions.

Conclusion of Pursuit

An extremely dangerous situation exists at the conclusion of a pursuit. Officers should continue to treat the vehicle as a high-risk stop and should not approach it. If a suspect(s) flees from the pursued vehicle, officers need to consider many factors prior to beginning a foot pursuit. The time of day/night, terrain, use of K-9, helicopter availability, proximity of additional officers, awareness of surroundings, and seriousness of the crime are just a few issues to take into consideration prior to engaging in a foot pursuit. The danger of the situation increases when a vehicle pursuit turns into a foot pursuit. If the foot pursuit takes the officer by the suspect vehicle, the vehicle should be tactically cleared prior to running past it.

Safety Concerns

- Vehicle Inspection:

Officers should routinely inspect the major components of their vehicle. Specific attention should be placed on the vehicle tires. Under-inflated tires create unnecessary risk for the driver and occupant(s). Poor mechanical condition increases the chances of

mechanical malfunction and places the driver at risk if faced with adverse driving conditions.

- **Backing:**

A large percentage of law enforcement collisions occur while backing. Officers should plan their driving route to eliminate the need for backing if possible. When backing is unavoidable, safety techniques can be used to reduce backing collisions.

Officers should place emphasis on the idea of backing a vehicle when considerable time can be given to backing the vehicle and there is not a sense of urgency. An officer should complete reverse maneuvering at a point when there is the least amount of vulnerability and with full control over the vehicle. Backing should be done slowly and in short distances. Officers should visually check the rear of their vehicle for obstructions and pedestrians.

- **Weather Conditions:**

Weather is a factor in law enforcement driving. Rain, snow, and ice can cause slick and hazardous conditions. A vehicle cannot respond as quickly and efficiently on wet surfaces. These risks are increased when officers do not alter their driving habits to compensate for these conditions. Officers should drive slower and brake earlier on wet surfaces.

- **Door Locks:**

It is recommended that officers lock their doors during their driving duties. A locked door will provide better protection in a collision by substantially decreasing the risk of the door opening during a collision.

- **Seatbelts:**

To reduce the possibility of injury in a collision, it is important that seatbelts be worn properly. The shoulder harness should fit snugly on the chest and the lap belt should be as low on the hips as possible.

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