



## **General Operating Guideline # 401**

**Subject: Best Practices for Apparatus Drivers/Operators**

**Approval: June 15, 2023**

### **Section 1: Purpose**

Safety is top priority. Emergency vehicle drivers have a high standard of care to the Fire Department members and to the public and shall hold their safety in the highest regard. Emergency vehicle drivers must always retain command and control of their vehicles.

This guideline outlines best practices for apparatus drivers in the safe operation of Fire Department apparatus. It is not intended to replace, contravene or supersede the requirements outlined in current Motor Vehicle Regulations nor substitute for specific Fire Department best practices and operating procedures.

### **Section 2: Scope**

These driver best practices are applicable to Lunenburg Regional Fire and Emergency Service personnel.

### **Section 3: General Responsibilities**

1. The driver of any Fire Department vehicle is directly responsible for the safe operation of the vehicle under all conditions. When the driver is under the direct supervision of an Officer, that Officer shall also assume responsibility for the actions of the driver.
2. Vehicle operators must constantly monitor and reduce the amount of risk and exposure to potential losses during each response.
3. Safe arrival at the emergency or other scene and return to the station shall be, and must always remain, the priority of all emergency vehicle operators.
4. Drivers shall never operate any equipment or apparatus if in any way impaired due to the use of alcohol, drugs or other medications.
5. If no qualified driver responds to the station following a dispatch page, another department shall be paged out to respond.

### **Section 4: Best Practices**

#### **4.1 Non-emergency Vehicle Operations**

- When operating in a non-emergency mode, the vehicles shall be driven without audible or visual warning devices and in compliance with all provincial motor vehicle laws that apply to civilian traffic.

#### **4.2 Emergency Response Rules of the Road**

- Drivers shall observe the traffic laws of the road and always observe safe and defensive driving under all response codes and driving conditions. Exemptions for emergency vehicles in the Motor Vehicle Act do not relieve the driver of any such vehicle from the duty to drive with due regard for the safety of all persons using the highway, nor shall it protect the driver of any such vehicle from the consequences of a reckless disregard of the safety of others.

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Fire & Emergency Services

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- When responding to a true emergency only, operate the vehicle as close to the posted speed limit as possible, but not to exceed the posted speed limit, conditions permitting. Slower response speeds may be necessary due to slippery road conditions, sharp curves, inclement weather, poor visibility or heavy and congested traffic conditions. The driver shall always maintain a speed that is safe under the prevailing conditions.
- The driver of an authorized emergency vehicle may disregard regulations governing the direction of movement and turning in specific directions if he/she does not endanger life and/or property.

### **4.3 School zones**

- Drivers must observe the posted speed limit for school zones when children are present or when speed warning lights are flashing.
- Fire apparatus, both emergency and non-emergency traffic shall stop for school buses loading or unloading as indicated by the buses flashing lights and/or stop sign.

### **4.4 Warning Devices**

- Drivers shall attempt to make all other drivers aware of the presence of the department vehicle. All audible and visible warning devices shall be in operation when responding to an emergency incident, regardless of time of day and or traffic conditions. Drivers must remain vigilant as these warning devices are not always effective in making other vehicle operators aware of your presence.

### **4.5 Seatbelts and Riding Policy**

- All persons riding in fire department vehicles or apparatus shall be seated and secured by seat belts or safety harnesses at any time the vehicle is in motion. Riding on tail boards, side steps, running boards, or in any other exposed positions, or standing while riding is prohibited.
- The driver and/or the person riding in the officer position will verify that personnel are properly seated and secured with seat belts in approved riding positions before the vehicle is moved.
- If required in support of EHS responses and in compliance with EHS policy, members may be exempt from wearing seat belts while actively assisting with emergency medical care while the ambulance is in motion, where requirements to be seated and restrained with seat belts would jeopardize patient care. The driver and response personnel shall take extraordinary precaution in recognition of the additional danger that exists while driving with unrestrained member(s).

### **4.6 Station Departure**

- Prior to entering the cab and starting the vehicle, the driver shall complete a circle check around the vehicle to see that all equipment is secured, that all compartment doors are securely closed and any physical obstructions moved out of the way. All power cords and airlines shall be disconnected prior to moving the vehicle. All SCBA shall remain strapped to the seat until arrival at the scene.
- The driver shall ensure apparatus bay doors are raised fully and there are no objects or personnel in the path of the vehicle prior to moving the vehicle.

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- All personnel in the vehicle shall be belted and in proper riding positions prior to the vehicle moving.
- Only one vehicle at a time shall exit the hall onto the tarmac, allowing the driver an unobstructed view of the street.
- The driver shall test brakes before entering street. The driver and the IC shall ensure that vehicle path is clear and any traffic has stopped on the street prior to the vehicle entering the street.
- If conditions warrant the use of emergency lights and siren, they shall be operating prior to the vehicle entering the street.

#### **4.7 Vehicle Reversing**

- Operating emergency vehicles in reverse is hazardous as the driver has limited vision and should be avoided whenever possible.
- Sound the vehicle horn before beginning any reversing operation.
- When necessary, a minimum of one spotter shall be at the rear of the apparatus and has responsibility for guiding the Driver and ensuring that any potential hazards are avoided.
- The spotter shall position themselves to have an unobstructed view and be in visual and voice or radio contact with the apparatus driver. Spotters shall not ride the tailboard while backing the apparatus.
- If the Driver loses visual contact with the spotter(s), the Driver shall stop the apparatus immediately and not resume operation until the spotter is visible once again.
- In situations where assistance is not available and the apparatus must be immediately moved, the Driver shall complete a circle check of the vehicle before reversing to ensure no person or persons or other potential obstructions are directly behind the vehicle or in its intended path of travel, all equipment is secured and that all compartment doors are securely closed.
- Vehicle mounted cameras or other devices are not a substitute for a spotter.

#### **4.8 Radio Communications**

- To avoid driver distractions, all radio communications, cell phone or tablet usage shall be conducted by the Officer in Charge of the vehicle, not the driver. The driver should only operate emergency lighting, sirens, and air horns if required.

#### **4.9 Vehicle Control and Right-of-way**

- Drivers must always maintain command and control of their vehicle in such a manner as to provide the maximum level of safety for both the passengers and the public.
- Drivers must be aware that civilian vehicle operators may not react as expected and drivers must have safe options available when passing or overtaking vehicles.
- Drivers must always be aware of the rate of closure on other vehicles and pedestrians to ensure an appropriate approach speed and/or safe following distance is established and maintained.
- Emergency vehicle drivers must always be prepared to slow or bring their vehicle safely to a stop. If another vehicle operator fails to yield the right of way to an emergency vehicle, the emergency vehicle driver cannot force the right of way. The emergency driver does not have the right of way until the other vehicle yields to them.



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Fire & Emergency Services

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#### **4.10 Intersections**

- At uncontrolled intersections (no control devices e.g., stop sign, yield or traffic signal), the driver must scan the intersection for possible hazards and observe traffic in all four directions. The driver must change the siren cadence not less than 150 metres from intersection and slow down if there are any potential hazards while covering the brake pedal with the driver's foot. Avoid using the opposing lane of traffic if possible.
- At controlled intersections (control devices e.g., stop sign, yield sign, yellow or red traffic light), drivers shall approach red lights, stop signs and or intersections with emergency lights, siren, and air horns in operation.
- The driver must scan the intersection for possible hazards and observe traffic in all four directions.
- The driver must change the siren cadence not less than 150 metres from and slow down if there are any potential hazards while covering the brake pedal with the driver's foot.
- During emergency response the driver must bring the vehicle to a complete stop when directed by a law enforcement officer, at red traffic lights and stop signs, when encountering a stopped school bus with flashing warning lights at any time driver cannot account for visible traffic in the lanes of traffic in an intersection or when other intersection hazards are present.

#### **4.11 Railway Crossings**

- All Department vehicles shall stop at railway crossings during emergency and non-emergency operations.
- The driver, in addition to regular emergency lighting, shall turn on the four-way flashers 150 metres from the crossing and gradually slow the vehicle down prior to stopping at the crossing.
- The driver and Officer in Charge shall look in both directions to confirm that no train is coming from either direction.
- Once the track is confirmed clear the driver may resume the trip, turning off the four-way flashers once over tracks.
- If the crossing lights and bells are operating, the driver shall not cross the tracks until the train has passed. Never attempt to outrun a train.
- While waiting for the train to pass the driver shall put the transmission in neutral and apply brakes.

#### **4.12 Return to Station**

- On the return to the fire station emergency lights and sirens should be turned off.
- If required due to traffic conditions at the fire station, emergency lights may be turned on when directly approaching the fire station (150 meters) to make the public aware of the apparatus approaching the entrance to the fire station.
- If reversing into the station is required spotters should be used to ensure any traffic is stopped while the apparatus makes entry to the station.

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- The driver of each apparatus shall ensure the logbook has been filled out and all equipment and supplies used during the response has been, cleaned, replenished, fuelled and returned to the proper storage.
- When all units are ready to respond dispatch is to be informed the department is back in service.

**4.13 Response in Privately Owned Vehicles**

- When any member responds to the station or to the scene of an emergency in his/her private vehicle, each member must strictly adhere to all applicable motor vehicle laws. Privately owned vehicles are not provided with the same exemptions that are provided to emergency vehicles. Private vehicles are not covered under Department insurance policy and members may be held liable or criminally responsible for actions should an accident occur.
- When proceeding to the hall or the scene all members shall obey all rules of the road. In addition, members shall safely adjust speed accordingly for the road, weather, and visibility conditions.

**4.14 Apparatus Accidents**

- Members are responsible for avoiding unsafe acts and situations that may endanger them, fellow members, and the public or might cause damage to the property of others or the department.
- Department vehicles that are involved in an accident of any type, whether parked, involving a stationary object or another vehicle, shall be reported immediately.
- Any member who is involved in an accident while responding to an incident shall remain on the scene of the accident and immediately notify the proper authorities and the Fire Chief.
- Accidents shall be investigated and proper remedial action taken to prevent recurrence of similar accidents.