Ames Fire Department
Standard Operating Guidelines

Book: 3 – Emergency Operations
Section: II – Fire Company Operations
Chapter: 2 – **Safe Emergency Vehicle Operation**
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PURPOSE:

To provide model procedures required to support the safe and effective operation of all fire and emergency vehicles, including fire apparatus, rescue vehicles, ambulances, command and support units, and any other vehicles operated by Ames Fire Department members in the performance of their duties.

POLICY:

The following policies apply to members who are driving Fire Department vehicles in an emergency response mode (the same policy applies to the emergency operation of any other vehicle within the scope of a driver's Fire Department duties).

PROCEDURES:

Regulatory and Statute Compliance

State of Iowa traffic laws include specific provisions for emergency vehicles while they are engaged in emergency operations. The Ames Fire Department Standard Operating Guidelines specify when and how these exceptions will be applied. The Fire Department driving guidelines may be, in some cases, more restrictive than state traffic laws.

The motor vehicle laws of Iowa grant specific allowances and exemptions to emergency vehicles, when they are responding to emergency incidents and using the required warning devices. These provisions only apply to officially recognized emergency vehicles *when responding to emergency incidents* while in compliance with all of the applicable laws and regulations.

State of Iowa traffic laws require an emergency vehicle to be equipped with warning lights and audible warning devices. The traffic laws also require other drivers to yield the right-of-way to an emergency vehicle when the warning lights and/or audible warning devices are in operation. An emergency vehicle's right-of-way cannot be assumed by the use of warning lights and audible warning devices, it is always the emergency vehicle driver's responsibility to ensure that the other driver yields. These devices are intended to make other drivers aware of the presence of an emergency vehicle; however, other drivers cannot be expected to yield the right-of-way if they do not see or are not aware of the emergency vehicle.

Notwithstanding such allowances and exemptions, by State law, the driver of the emergency vehicle is required to operate responsibly at all times, with due regard for the safety of all other persons and property. The emergency vehicle driver is

responsible for operating in a safe and prudent manner, recognizing that other driver could be distracted, inattentive, or simply uncooperative. Emergency vehicle drivers are not permitted to employ aggressive driving techniques to force other drivers to yield the right-of-way.

Ames Fire Department members should use the following sections to help guide them with safe emergency vehicle operations.

Use of Warning Devices

- While responding in an emergency mode, Fire Department policy requires drivers to make their presence evident using both audible *and* visual warning devices.
    - Emergency vehicle drivers should endeavor to make their intentions as clear as possible and their vehicles as visible as possible to other drivers.
    - Warning lights should be used when the Fire Department vehicle is maneuvering or stopped in a location where it creates a traffic hazard.
    - When parked, audible warning device use should be discontinued.

Speed Limitations

- Pursuant to the authority of Iowa Code 321.231, subsection 3B, the driver of a Fire Department vehicle may, when responding in an emergency mode, “exceed the maximum speed limits so long as the driver does not endanger life or property.”
    - The foregoing provisions do not relieve the driver from the duty to drive with due regard for the safety of all persons, nor protect the driver from the consequences of reckless disregard for the safety of others.
    - When conditions are unfavorable, the posted speed limit should not be exceeded and actual speed should be determined by the conditions.
    - The driver should never exceed a speed that is safe and prudent, based on road and weather conditions and other circumstances, including the design and capabilities of the vehicle.
- The posted advisory speed for a curve should be considered the maximum allowable speed under all conditions, regardless of response condition.

Intersection Navigation

- The Fire Department emergency vehicle shall come to a full stop before entering a negative right-of-way intersection (red light, flashing red light, or stop sign), blind intersection, or any intersection where hazards are present and/or the driver cannot account for all oncoming traffic lanes.

  - The emergency vehicle should not enter the intersection until all approaching traffic has yielded the right-of-way and it is safe to proceed.
  - The emergency vehicle driver should ensure that all approaching vehicles in all lanes have yielded the right-of-way before advancing.
  - If necessary, due to traffic conditions or visual obstructions, the emergency vehicle driver should cross the intersection in stages, treating each lane as a separate intersection, stopping the vehicle, as necessary, to ensure that each lane may be crossed safely.
- When passing through an intersection where the emergency vehicle has the right-of-way, by virtue of a green light in the direction of travel and/or a stop signal (stop sign) for cross-traffic, the emergency vehicle should not exceed the posted speed limit.
  - Emergency vehicle drivers should not assume that oncoming/opposing traffic has stopped, even when facing a green signal or "clear" route.
  - Emergency vehicle drivers must visually confirm that oncoming/opposing traffic is stopped while approaching any intersection, and be prepared to stop immediately, if necessary.

Traveling in Opposing Traffic Lanes

- Pursuant to the authority of Iowa Code 321.231, subsection 2B, the driver of any authorized emergency vehicle, may "disregard laws or regulations governing direction of movement for the minimum distance necessary before an alternative route that conforms to the traffic laws and regulations is available."
  - Per Fire Department policy, the above applies only when such vehicle is making use of both audible (siren) *and* visual signaling devices (emergency lighting).
  - The foregoing provisions do not relieve the driver from the duty to drive with due regard for the safety of all persons, nor protect the driver from the consequences of their reckless disregard for the safety of others.
  - Operating emergency vehicles in opposing traffic lanes is extremely hazardous under all conditions and should only be considered if there is no alternate route of travel.
  - When an emergency vehicle must travel in an opposing traffic lane or in a center turn lane to maneuver around slow moving or stopped traffic, it's speed shall not exceed the posted speed limit, and in most cases, should remain significantly below the posted speed limit to allow for sufficient reaction time.
  - When approaching a controlled intersection (traffic lights or stop signs) in an opposing traffic lane or center turn lane, the emergency vehicle should

come to a full stop before entering the intersection, even if the traffic light is green in the direction of travel.

- If there is a median separating the emergency vehicle from the slow or stopped traffic, the emergency vehicle should not exceed the posted speed limit (actual speed should depend on the road, traffic, and weather conditions).

Passing Traffic in an Emergency Vehicle

- When overtaking traffic that is moving in the same direction, the emergency vehicle driver should give other drivers an opportunity to yield the right-of-way before passing.
    - If it is necessary to pass a vehicle that has not yielded the right-of-way, the emergency vehicle should provide as wide a clearance as possible.
- A Fire Department emergency vehicle should not overtake another emergency vehicle that is traveling in the same direction unless the driver of the lead vehicle has indicated that the other may pass.
    - A following vehicle may contact a leading vehicle by radio to request permission to pass.

Railroad Crossing

- The emergency vehicle shall come to a full stop at unguarded railway grade crossings.
- Caution should be exercised at grade crossings where warning lights and/or gates are provided, due in part because:
    - It is not always possible to hear an approaching train, due to the Doppler Effect (the perceptible change in the frequency and wavelength of a sound wave as it moves relative to an observer) and the type of locomotives used on some rail lines (particularly electric locomotives).
    - Otherwise “normal” appearing highway vehicles, equipped with rail wheels, are also used by railroads and may be encountered at grade crossings.
- When approaching a grade crossing with lowered gates and/or active lights and no apparent rail traffic, the emergency vehicle shall come to a full stop prior to the crossing.
    - Before proceeding, the emergency vehicle driver should visually confirm that no train or other rail vehicle is approaching on the tracks.
    - Complete confirmation may require that members physically dismount the vehicle to visually check the tracks.

- Warning devices and crossing gates are generally reliable but can fail due to the harsh conditions to which they are exposed—these devices are designed to fail in the "safe" mode.

Stopped School Bus

- The emergency vehicle should not pass a school bus that has stopped with red lights flashing to load or disembark passengers, unless the bus driver clearly signals that it is safe to pass.
  - When clearly signaled by the bus driver that it is safe to pass a stopped school bus, the emergency vehicle should proceed slowly and with extreme caution past the school bus;
  - AFD members must be vigilant for children while approaching and passing the bus.
- The emergency vehicle driver must be prepared to stop immediately while approaching, passing, and leaving the area in which the school bus is stopped.

Frequency and Content of Driver Training Requirements

- Annual emergency vehicle training will include both classroom and hands on driving time.
- The content of emergency vehicle training may be based on curriculum from the International Fire Service Training Association's *Pumping and Aerial Apparatus Driver/Operator Handbook,* third edition, or an equivalent curriculum or standard with prior approval from Fire Administration.
- Hands on driver training may include job performance requirements from the current NFPA 1002 Standard for Fire Apparatus Driver/Operator Professional Qualifications or NFPA 1001 Standard for Fire Fighter Professional Qualifications for Fire Fighter I, or other equivalent standard with prior approval from Fire Administration.

REFERENCES:

Authorized Emergency Vehicles and Police Bicycles, Section 321.231 of the Code of Iowa (2020).

Pumping and Aerial Apparatus Driver/Operator Handbook (3nd Ed), International Fire Service Training Association (2015).