

Vehicle Pursuits

306.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to establish Departmental procedures governing vehicle pursuits, pursuit tactics and the use of roadblocks. Syracuse police officers have the sworn responsibility to protect the life and property of all persons within the City of Syracuse and to apprehend law violators. Indiscriminate and uncontrolled vehicle pursuits for the purpose of apprehending fleeing subjects violates this sworn responsibility by endangering the life of the officer, the suspect being pursued, other drivers, the public and property. Given that no policy can realistically predict every possible situation an officer might encounter, members are entrusted to use well-reasoned discretion when operating in a pursuit, and shall operate with due regard to the safety of the public.

It is the policy of the Syracuse Police Department that vehicle pursuits shall be limited to those instances when, in the officer's judgment, the danger created by the possible escape of the fleeing suspect outweighs the danger created by a pursuit, and no reasonable alternative exists.

306.1.1 DEFINITIONS

Definitions related to this policy include:

Blocking or vehicle intercept - A slow-speed coordinated maneuver where two or more pursuing vehicles simultaneously intercept and block the movement of a suspect vehicle, the driver of which may be unaware of the impending enforcement stop. The goal is containment and preventing a pursuit. Blocking is not a moving or stationary road block.

Boxing-in - A tactic designed to stop a suspect's vehicle by surrounding it with law enforcement vehicles and then slowing all vehicles to a stop.

Ramming - The deliberate act of contacting a suspect's vehicle with another law enforcement vehicle to functionally damage or otherwise force the suspect's vehicle to stop.

Roadblocks - A tactic designed to stop a suspect's vehicle by intentionally placing a law enforcement vehicle or other immovable object in the path of the suspect's vehicle.

Terminate - To discontinue a pursuit or stop chasing fleeing vehicles.

Tire deflation device - A device designed to puncture the tires of the pursued vehicle. This controlled deflation will cause a reduction in speed, thus allowing the pursuing officers to gain control over the suspect.

Trail - Following the path of the pursuit at a safe speed while obeying all traffic laws and without activating emergency equipment. If the pursuit is at a slow rate of speed, the trailing vehicle will maintain sufficient distance from the pursuit vehicles so as to clearly indicate an absence of participation in the pursuit.

Vehicle pursuit - An event involving one or more law enforcement officers attempting to apprehend a suspect, who is attempting to avoid arrest while operating a vehicle by using high-

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speed driving or other evasive tactics, such as driving off a highway, turning suddenly or driving in a legal manner but willfully failing to yield to an officer's emergency signal to stop.

306.2 POLICY

It is the policy of this department to weigh the importance of apprehending suspects who unlawfully flee from law enforcement against the risks associated with vehicle pursuits, however, given that no policy can realistically predict every possible situation an officer might encounter, officers are entrusted to use well-reasoned discretion in determining when it is appropriate to initiate or terminate a pursuit as well as the tactics used during the pursuit.

306.3 OFFICER RESPONSIBILITIES

Vehicle pursuits should only be conducted using authorized police department emergency vehicles that are equipped with emergency lighting and sirens.

Officers shall drive with reasonable care for the safety of all persons and property. However, officers may, when in pursuit of a suspect and provided there is no unreasonable risk to persons and property (Vehicle and Traffic Law § 1104):

- (a) Stop, stand or park in violation of the rules of the road.
- (b) Proceed past a steady red signal, a flashing red signal or a stop sign, but only after slowing down as may be necessary for safe operation and it is clear and safe to proceed.
- (c) Exceed the maximum speed limits so long as life and property are not endangered.
- (d) Disregard vehicle and traffic regulations except for those specifically forbidden under this policy.

306.3.1 WHEN TO INITIATE A PURSUIT

A member is authorized to engage in a motor vehicle pursuit if the officer reasonably believes that the suspect has committed or is about to commit any felony or a violent misdemeanor against a person.

Factors that shall be considered, both individually and collectively, when deciding to initiate or continue a pursuit include, but are not limited to:

- (a) The seriousness of the known or reasonably suspected crime and its relationship to community safety.
- (b) The importance of protecting the public and balancing the known or reasonably suspected offense and the apparent need for immediate capture against the risks to officers, innocent motorists and others.
- (c) The safety of the public in the area of the pursuit, including the type of area, time of day, the amount of vehicular and pedestrian traffic (e.g., school zones) and the speed of the pursuit relative to these factors.
- (d) The pursuing officers' familiarity with the area of the pursuit, the quality of radio communications between the pursuing vehicles and 911 center dispatchers/

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supervisor, and the driving capabilities of the pursuing officers under the conditions of the pursuit.

- (e) Whether weather, traffic and road conditions unreasonably increase the danger of the pursuit when weighed against the risks resulting from the suspect's escape.
- (f) Whether the identity of the suspect has been verified and whether there is comparatively minimal risk in allowing the suspect to be apprehended at a later time.
- (g) The performance capabilities of the vehicles used in the pursuit in relation to the speed and other conditions of the pursuit.
- (h) Emergency lighting and siren limitations on unmarked police department vehicles that may reduce visibility of the vehicle, such as visor or dash-mounted lights, concealable or temporary emergency lighting equipment and concealed or obstructed siren positioning.
- (i) Vehicle speeds.
- (j) Other persons in or on the pursued vehicle (e.g., passengers, co-offenders and hostages).
- (k) The availability of other resources, such as air support assistance.
- (l) Whether the pursuing vehicle is carrying passengers other than on-duty police officers. Pursuits shall not be undertaken with an arrestee in the pursuit vehicle.

306.3.2 WHEN TO TERMINATE A PURSUIT

Pursuits should be terminated whenever the totality of objective circumstances known or which reasonably ought to be known to the officer or supervisor during the pursuit indicates that the present risks of continuing the pursuit reasonably appear to outweigh the risks resulting from the suspect's escape.

When a supervisor directs the pursuit to be terminated, officers will immediately terminate the pursuit.

The factors listed in this policy on when to initiate a pursuit will apply equally to the decision to terminate a pursuit. Officers and supervisors must objectively and continuously weigh the seriousness of the offense against the potential danger to innocent motorists, themselves and the public when electing to continue a pursuit.

In addition to the factors that govern when to initiate a pursuit, other factors should be considered in deciding whether to terminate a pursuit, including:

- (a) The distance between the pursuing vehicle and the fleeing vehicle is so great that further pursuit would be futile or require the pursuit to continue for an unreasonable time or distance.
- (b) The pursued vehicle's location is no longer definitely known.
- (c) The pursuing vehicle sustains damage or a mechanical failure that renders it unsafe to drive.

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- (d) The pursuing vehicle's emergency lighting equipment or siren becomes partially or completely inoperable.
- (e) Hazards posed to uninvolved bystanders or motorists.
- (f) The danger that the continued pursuit poses to the public, the officers or the suspect, balanced against the risk of allowing the suspect to remain at large.
- (g) The identity of the suspect is known and it does not reasonably appear that the need for immediate capture outweighs the risks associated with continuing the pursuit.

306.3.3 PROHIBITED ACTIONS

The following actions are prohibited by Members during a vehicle pursuit:

- (a) Ramming suspect vehicles.
- (b) Boxing in or surrounding a suspect vehicle (marked and unmarked units may be used to box in an unaware suspect in order to avoid a pursuit).
- (c) Overtaking, driving next to, or forcing suspect vehicles off the roadway.
- (d) Creating roadblocks. Roadblock is defined as any method, restriction (including a partial restriction), or obstruction, used or intended for the purpose of preventing free passage of motor vehicles on a highway or street, in order to effect the apprehension of an actual or suspected violator in a motor vehicle.
- (e) Discharging a firearm from a moving vehicle during an on-going pursuit.
- (f) Entering an Interstate highway against the normal flow of traffic.
- (g) Pursuits with an arrestee in the pursuit vehicle.
- (h) Engaging in a pursuit in a specialized vehicle (i.e. evidence technician van, prisoner transport vehicle, other specialty unit vehicles).

306.4 PURSUIT VEHICLES

When involved in a pursuit, unmarked police department emergency vehicles should be replaced by marked emergency vehicles whenever practicable.

Vehicle pursuits should be limited to three police department emergency vehicles (two pursuit vehicles and the supervisor vehicle). However, the number of vehicles involved will vary with the circumstances.

An officer or supervisor may request that additional vehicles join a pursuit if, after assessing the factors outlined above, it appears that the number of officers involved would be insufficient to safely arrest the number of suspects. All other officers shall stay out of the pursuit but should remain alert to its progress and location. Any officer who drops out of a pursuit may then, if necessary, proceed to the pursuit termination point at legal speeds, following the appropriate rules of the road.

306.4.1 MOTORCYCLES

When involved in a pursuit, police department motorcycles should be replaced by marked emergency vehicles as soon as practicable.

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306.4.2 VEHICLES WITHOUT EMERGENCY EQUIPMENT

Officers operating vehicles not equipped with emergency lights and siren are prohibited from initiating or joining in any pursuit. Officers in such vehicles may provide support to pursuing vehicles as long as the vehicle is operated in compliance with all traffic laws. Those officers should discontinue such support immediately upon arrival of a sufficient number of authorized emergency police department vehicles or any air support.

306.4.3 PRIMARY PURSUIT VEHICLE RESPONSIBILITIES

The initial pursuing officer will be designated as the primary pursuit vehicle and will be responsible for the conduct of the pursuit unless they are unable to remain reasonably close to the suspect's vehicle. The primary responsibility of the officer initiating the pursuit is the apprehension of the suspect without unreasonable danger to him/herself or others.

The primary pursuing officer should notify the 911 center dispatchers, commencing with a request for priority radio traffic, that a vehicle pursuit has been initiated, and as soon as practicable provide information including, but not limited to:

- (a) The location, direction of travel and estimated speed of the suspect's vehicle.
- (b) The description of the suspect's vehicle including the license plate number, if known.
- (c) The reason for the pursuit.
- (d) The use of firearms, threat of force, violence, injuries, hostages or other unusual hazards.
- (e) The number of occupants and identity or description.
- (f) The weather, road and traffic conditions.
- (g) The need for any additional resources or equipment.
- (h) The identity of other law enforcement agencies involved in the pursuit.

Until relieved by a supervisor or a secondary pursuing officer, the officer in the primary pursuit vehicle shall be responsible for broadcasting the progress of the pursuit. Unless circumstances reasonably indicate otherwise, the primary pursuing officer should, as soon as practicable, relinquish the responsibility of broadcasting the progress of the pursuit to an officer in a secondary pursuit vehicle or to air support joining the pursuit to minimize distractions and allow the primary pursuing officer to concentrate foremost on safe pursuit tactics.

306.4.4 SECONDARY PURSUIT VEHICLE RESPONSIBILITIES

The second officer in the pursuit will be designated as the secondary pursuit vehicle and is responsible for:

- (a) Immediately notifying the 911 center dispatchers of their entry into the pursuit.
- (b) Remaining a safe distance behind the primary pursuit vehicle unless directed to assume the role of primary pursuit vehicle or if the primary pursuit vehicle is unable to continue the pursuit.
- (c) Broadcasting information that the primary pursuing officer is unable to provide.

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- (d) Broadcasting the progress of the pursuit, updating known or critical information and providing changes in the pursuit, unless the situation indicates otherwise.
- (e) Identifying the need for additional resources or equipment as appropriate.
- (f) Serving as backup to the primary pursuing officer once the suspect has been stopped.

306.5 PURSUIT DRIVING

The decision to use specific driving tactics requires the same assessment of the factors the officer considered when determining whether to initiate and/or terminate a pursuit. The following are tactics for officers who are involved in the pursuit:

- (a) Officers, considering their driving skills and vehicle performance capabilities, will space themselves from other involved vehicles such that they are able to see and avoid hazards or react safely to unusual maneuvers by the fleeing vehicle.
- (b) Because intersections can present increased risks, the following tactics should be considered:
 - 1. Available officers not directly involved in the pursuit may proceed safely to controlled intersections ahead of the pursuit in an effort to warn cross traffic.
 - 2. Pursuing officers should exercise due caution and slow down as may be necessary when proceeding through controlled intersections.
- (c) The pursuit of a vehicle on an Interstate highway against the normal flow of traffic is prohibited. If a pursued vehicle enters an Interstate highway traveling the wrong way, the primary unit will notify the dispatcher. Additional units shall be dispatched to attempt to locate the vehicle from the lane(s), with the normal flow of traffic and by covering exit/entrance ramps where the pursued vehicle may attempt to exit.
 - 1. Request assistance from available air support.
 - 2. Maintain visual contact with the pursued vehicle by paralleling the vehicle while driving on the correct side of the roadway.
 - 3. Request other officers to observe exits available to the suspect.
- (d) Notify the New York State Police or other law enforcement agency if it appears that the pursuit may enter its jurisdiction.
- (e) Officers involved in a pursuit should not attempt to pass other pursuing vehicles unless the situation indicates otherwise or they are requested to do so by the pursuing officer and with a clear understanding of the maneuver process between the involved officers.

306.5.1 PURSUIT TRAILING

In the event that initial pursuing officers relinquish control of the pursuit to another agency, the initial officers may, with the permission of a supervisor, trail the pursuit to the termination point in order to provide information and assistance for the arrest of the suspect and reporting the incident.

306.5.2 AIR SUPPORT ASSISTANCE

At the request of the supervisor, and when available, air support assistance may be requested. Once the air support crew has established visual contact with the pursued vehicle, they should

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assume communication control over the pursuit. The primary and secondary ground pursuit vehicles, or involved supervisor, will maintain operational control but should consider whether the participation of air support warrants their continued close proximity and/or involvement in the pursuit.

The air support crew should coordinate the activities of resources on the ground, report progress of the pursuit, and provide officers and supervisors with details of upcoming traffic congestion, road hazards or other pertinent information to evaluate whether to continue the pursuit. If officers on the ground are not within visual contact of the pursued vehicle and the air support crew determines that it is unsafe to continue the pursuit, the air support crew may recommend terminating the pursuit.

306.5.3 OFFICERS NOT INVOLVED IN THE PURSUIT

Officers who are not involved in the pursuit should remain in their assigned areas, should not parallel the pursuit route and should not become involved with the pursuit unless directed otherwise by a supervisor. Uninvolved officers are authorized to use emergency equipment at intersections along the pursuit path to clear intersections of vehicular and pedestrian traffic to protect the public. Those officers should attempt to place their vehicles in locations that provide some safety or an escape route in the event of an unintended collision or if the suspect intentionally tries to ram the police department vehicle.

Non-pursuing members needed at the pursuit termination point should respond in a non-emergency manner, observing the rules of the road.

The primary pursuit vehicle, secondary pursuit vehicle and supervisor vehicle should be the only vehicles operating under emergency conditions (emergency lights and siren) unless other officers are assigned to the pursuit.

306.6 SUPERVISORY CONTROL AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Supervisory and management control will be exercised immediately over all vehicle pursuits involving officers from this department.

The field supervisor of the officer initiating the pursuit, or if unavailable, the nearest field supervisor, will be responsible for:

- (a) Immediately notifying involved officers and the 911 center dispatchers of supervisory presence and ascertaining all reasonably available information to continuously assess the situation and risk factors associated with the pursuit. This is to ensure that the pursuit is conducted within established department guidelines.
- (b) Engaging in the pursuit, when appropriate, to provide on-scene supervision.
- (c) Exercising management and control of the pursuit even if not engaged in it.
- (d) Ensuring that no more than the required law enforcement vehicles are involved in the pursuit under the guidelines set forth in this policy.
- (e) Directing that the pursuit be terminated if, in their judgment, it is not justified to continue the pursuit under the guidelines of this policy.

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- (f) Ensuring that assistance from air support, canines or additional resources is requested, if available and appropriate.
- (g) Ensuring that the proper radio channel is being used.
- (h) Ensuring that the Watch Commander is notified of the pursuit, as soon as practicable.
- (i) Ensuring the notification and/or coordination of outside agencies if the pursuit either leaves or is likely to leave the jurisdiction of this department.
- (j) Controlling and managing Syracuse Police Department officers when a pursuit enters another jurisdiction.
- (k) Preparing a post-pursuit review and documentation of the pursuit as required.

306.6.1 WATCH COMMANDER RESPONSIBILITIES

The Watch Commander shall monitor and continually assess the situation and ensure the pursuit is conducted within the guidelines and requirements of this policy. The Watch Commander has the final responsibility for the coordination, control and termination of a vehicle pursuit and shall be in overall command.

The Watch Commander shall review all pertinent reports for content and forward them to the Commanding Officer.

306.7 ONONDAGA COUNTY 911 CENTER

If the pursuit is confined within the City limits, radio communications will be conducted on the primary channel unless instructed otherwise by a patrol supervisor. If the pursuit leaves the jurisdiction of this department or such is imminent, involved officers should, whenever available, switch radio communications to a tactical or emergency channel most accessible by participating agencies.

306.7.1 RESPONSIBILITIES

Upon notification or becoming aware that a pursuit has been initiated, the 911 center dispatchers are responsible for:

- (a) Clearing the radio channel of non-emergency traffic.
- (b) Coordinating pursuit communications of the involved officers.
- (c) Broadcasting pursuit updates as well as other pertinent information as necessary.
- (d) Ensuring that a field supervisor is notified of the pursuit.
- (e) Notifying and coordinating with other involved or affected agencies as practicable.
- (f) Notifying the Watch Commander as soon as practicable.
- (g) Assigning an incident number and logging all pursuit activities.

306.8 LOSS OF PURSUED VEHICLE

When the pursued vehicle is lost, the involved officers should broadcast pertinent information to assist other officers in locating the vehicle. The primary pursuing officer or supervisor will be

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responsible for coordinating any further search for either the pursued vehicle or suspects fleeing on foot.

306.9 INTERJURISDICTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

When a pursuit enters another agency's jurisdiction, the primary pursuing officer or supervisor, taking into consideration the distance traveled, unfamiliarity with the area and other pertinent facts, should determine whether to request the other agency to assume the pursuit.

Unless entry into another jurisdiction is expected to be brief, it is generally recommended that the primary pursuing officer or supervisor ensure that notification is provided to each outside jurisdiction into which the pursuit is reasonably expected to enter, regardless of whether the jurisdiction is expected to assist.

306.9.1 ASSUMPTION OF PURSUIT BY ANOTHER AGENCY

When pursuing a vehicle into another jurisdiction a supervisor will decide as to whether or not the pursuit should continue. If the pursuit is terminated the supervisor will ensure that notification is made through the 911 center to the relevant jurisdiction, including but not limited to:

- (a) The reason for the pursuit
- (b) The highest crime
- (c) Any additional risk factors

Notification of a pursuit in progress should not be construed as a request to join the pursuit. Requests to or from another agency to assume a pursuit should be specific. Because of communication limitations between local law enforcement agencies, a request for another agency's assistance will be made by a supervisor monitoring the pursuit.

306.9.2 PURSUITS EXTENDING INTO THIS JURISDICTION

The agency that initiates a pursuit shall be responsible for conducting the pursuit. Officers from this department should not join a pursuit unless specifically requested to do so by the pursuing agency, with approval from a supervisor, and provided the pursuit complies with department policy. The exception to this is when a single vehicle from the initiating agency is in pursuit. Under this circumstance, an officer from this department may, with supervisor approval, immediately join the pursuit until sufficient vehicles from the initiating agency join the pursuit or until additional information is provided allowing withdrawal from the pursuit.

When a request is made for this department to assist or take over a pursuit that has entered the jurisdiction of the Syracuse Police Department, the supervisor should consider:

- (a) The public's safety within this jurisdiction.
- (b) The safety of the pursuing officers.
- (c) Whether the circumstances are serious enough to continue the pursuit.
- (d) Whether there is adequate staffing to continue the pursuit.
- (e) The ability to maintain the pursuit.

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As soon as practicable, a supervisor or the Watch Commander should review a request for assistance from another agency. The Watch Commander or supervisor, after considering the above factors, may decline to assist in or assume the other agency's pursuit.

Assistance to a pursuing agency by officers of this department will conclude at the City limits, provided that the pursuing agency has sufficient assistance from other sources. Ongoing participation from this department may continue only until sufficient assistance is present.

In the event that the termination point of a pursuit from another agency is within this jurisdiction, officers shall provide appropriate assistance including, but not limited to, scene control, coordination and completion of supplemental reports and any other assistance requested or needed.

306.10 PURSUIT INTERVENTION

.Pursuit intervention is an attempt to stop the suspect's ability to continue to flee in a vehicle through tactical application of technology, tire deflation devices, blocking or vehicle intercept, boxing-in, ramming or roadblock procedures.

306.10.1 WHEN USE IS AUTHORIZED

Whenever practicable, an officer shall seek approval from a supervisor before employing any intervention to stop the pursued vehicle. In deciding whether to use intervention tactics, officers/supervisors should balance the risk of allowing the pursuit to continue with the potential hazards arising from the use of each tactic to the public, the officers and persons in or on the pursued vehicle. With this in mind, the decision to use any intervention tactic should be reasonable in light of the circumstances apparent to the officer at the time of the decision.

306.10.2 USE OF FIREARMS

The use of firearms to disable a pursued vehicle is not generally an effective tactic and involves all the dangers associated with discharging firearms. Officers are prohibited from discharging their firearms from their moving vehicle during an ongoing pursuit.

306.10.3 INTERVENTION STANDARDS

Tire deflation devices should be deployed only after notification of pursuing officers and the supervisor of the intent and location of the intended deployment, and in a manner that:

- (a) Should reasonably only affect the pursued vehicle.
- (b) Provides the deploying officer adequate cover and escape from intentional or unintentional exposure to the approaching vehicle.
- (c) Takes into account the limitations of such devices as well as the potential risk to officers, the public and occupants of the pursued vehicle.
- (d) Takes into account whether the pursued vehicle is a motorcycle, a vehicle transporting hazardous materials or a school bus transporting children.

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The tire deflation device shall not be deployed on two wheeled vehicles unless the use of deadly force can be legally justified. Only officers trained in the use of the tire deflation device are authorized to deploy it.

Members shall not engage in, nor will police vehicles be used, for the following purposes:

- (a) Ramming suspect vehicles.
- (b) Boxing in or surrounding a suspect vehicle (marked and unmarked units may be used to box in an unaware suspect in order to avoid a pursuit).
- (c) Overtaking, driving next to, or forcing suspect vehicles off the roadway.
- (d) Creating roadblocks. Roadblock is defined as any method, restriction (including a partial restriction), or obstruction, used or intended for the purpose of preventing free passage of motor vehicles on a highway or street, in order to effect the apprehension of an actual or suspected violator in a motor vehicle.

[See procedure for TIRE DEFLATION DEVICES](#)

306.11 CAPTURE OF SUSPECTS

Proper self-discipline and sound professional judgment are the keys to a successful conclusion of a pursuit and apprehension of evading suspects. Officers shall use only that amount of force that reasonably appears necessary given the facts and circumstances perceived by the officer at the time of the event to accomplish a legitimate law enforcement purpose.

Unless relieved by a supervisor, the primary pursuing officer should coordinate efforts to apprehend the suspect following the pursuit. Officers should consider the safety of the public and the involved officers when formulating plans for setting up perimeters or for containing and capturing the suspect.

306.12 REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

All appropriate reports shall be completed to comply with appropriate laws and policies or procedures.

- (a) The primary pursuing officer shall complete appropriate crime/arrest reports.
- (b) The supervisor shall complete a thorough investigation regarding the vehicle pursuit.
- (c) Upon completion of the investigation, a Blue Team entry will be completed and forwarded to the appropriate patrol lieutenant. Contained within the Blue Team entry shall be the supervisor's findings regarding whether or not the vehicle pursuit was in accordance with department policy and training.
- (d) The Blue Team entry should include, at a minimum:
 - 1. Date and time of the pursuit.
 - 2. Initial reason and circumstances surrounding the pursuit.
 - 3. Length of pursuit in distance and time, including the starting and termination points.

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4. Involved vehicles and officers.
 5. Alleged offenses.
 6. Whether a suspect was apprehended, as well as the means and methods used.
 - (a) Any use of force shall be reported and documented in compliance with the Use of Force Policy.
 7. Arrestee information, if applicable.
 8. Any injuries and/or medical treatment.
 9. Any property or equipment damage.
 10. Name of supervisor at the scene or who handled the incident.
- (e) Annually, the Chief of Police should direct a documented review and analysis of department vehicle pursuits to minimally include reporting procedures, policy suitability, policy compliance and training needs.

306.13 REGULAR AND PERIODIC PURSUIT TRAINING

All officers shall receive documented initial training and supplemental training on vehicle pursuits. All officers will participate, no less than annually, in regular and periodic training addressing this policy and the importance of vehicle safety and protecting the public. Training will include recognition of the need to balance the known offense and the need for immediate capture against the risks to officers and others.