


ST. LUCIE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

	Amends: G.O. 20.04 (08/01/01)	Effective: April 1, 2002	General Order: 20.04
		Title: Motor Vehicle Pursuits	
		Accreditation Standards: CFA & 17.07 CALEA & 1.3.2, 1.3.12, 41.2.1, 41.2.2, 61.3.4, 81.2.6 FCAC &	Attachments: FCN:

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PURPOSE: The purpose of this General Order is to establish guidelines for the declared and active pursuit of vehicles and specify when a deputy and/or supervisor should initiate or terminate a vehicle pursuit, and the responsibilities of the initiating deputy, the supervisor, the dispatcher, and any other involved emergency vehicles.

SCOPE: This order applies to all Sheriff's Office, Emergency Dispatch Operations Center, and Watch Commander Personnel.

DISCUSSION: The routine and emergency operation of Sheriff's vehicles is an area of prime concern to law enforcement and civilian members. Even though the police vehicle is an effective tool for law enforcement purposes, the deputy must realize that it is his duty to operate the vehicle safely at all times, even while in the act of pursuit. The fact that a deputy is engaged in pursuit does not relieve nor protect him from the consequences of a reckless disregard for the safety of others. Precautions must be taken to protect other motorists and pedestrians especially, because every pursuit driver if involved in a collision, may be subject to criminal indictment or to civil suit for damages for injuries inflicted.

PROCEDURE:

I. GENERAL GUIDELINES:

- A. An active pursuit must be considered as a potentially dangerous act, for the suspect(s), the deputy(s), and the general public.

- B.** Deputy(s) must avoid the tendency to consider only him/herself and the suspect(s).
- C.** Delay may be considered when a person is known and poses no immediate threat to the community. However, it is not in the best interests of public safety to advocate a policy that would encourage the dangerous driver, car thief, or fleeing criminal to proceed without the imminent possibility of police intervention.
- D.** Each deputy must use common sense in deciding whether or not to engage in a pursuit. No deputy will be held accountable if he/she weighs the risks and chooses to not pursue a fleeing vehicle.
- E.** Deputies will not initiate or engage in a pursuit while transporting non-departmental persons (prisoners, witnesses, civilian observers, etc.), unless extenuating circumstances prevail.
- F.** The decision whether or not to pursue will be based on known circumstances which include, but are not be limited to:
 - 1. The initiating deputy has probable cause to believe a crime has been or is being committed;
 - 2. The seriousness of the originating offense and its relationship to community safety;
 - 3. The probability of apprehension;
 - 4. The geographic location, population density (vehicle and pedestrian), land use, etc.;
 - 5. Time of day;
 - 6. Traffic and road conditions;
 - 7. Weather conditions;
 - 8. Familiarity of deputies and supervisors with the area of the pursuit;
 - 9. Speeds involved; and
 - 10. Quality of radio communications between pursuing unit(s), the dispatcher, and supervisor.
- G.** During an active pursuit, the deputy will at all times maintain such a distance between the marked vehicle and the pursued vehicle so a sudden stop or change of direction will not result in a collision.
- H.** The desirability of continuing a pursuit in which the fleeing vehicle refuses to stop will be evaluated continuously by a Patrol Supervisor.

II. PURSUIT VEHICLES:

- A.** Marked patrol cars equipped with or without roof mounted blue lights and sirens will engage in pursuits of fleeing vehicles as authorized in section I, F subsection 6 and 8.
- B.** Deputies in vans, unmarked cars, vehicles without emergency equipment, who have probable cause to believe that a crime has taken place and the suspect(s) are escaping in a vehicle, may pursue the fleeing vehicle, using due care, only until a marked vehicle with emergency equipment can take over the pursuit.
- C.** Deputies on motorcycles may pursue offenders only until a marked car with emergency equipment can take over the pursuit.

III. TRAFFIC LAW EXEMPTIONS:

- A.** All marked cars of the St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office are designated as emergency vehicles. The exemptions from complying with traffic laws granted to emergency vehicles by Sections 316.072 and 316.126(3), Florida Statutes, provisions of Florida Statutes relating to emergency vehicles apply.
- B.** Section 316.072(5), Florida Statutes, authorizes emergency vehicles to disregard traffic signals, (after slowing down as may be necessary for safe operation), stop signs, speed limits, directional signs, etc., as long as they do not endanger life and property when responding to an emergency call or in pursuit of suspected or actual violators of the law. Due regard for the safety of all persons must be adhered to during any pursuit.
- C.** Section 316.126, Florida Statutes, requires that emergency equipment be in continuous use when emergency vehicles are being operated beyond the laws regulating all other traffic.

IV. NOTIFICATION OF PURSUIT - OFFICER RESPONSIBILITY: When a deputy initiates an active pursuit, he/she will immediately activate all emergency equipment, make radio contact with the dispatcher, and communicate the following information:

- A.** Unit identification (call sign);
- B.** Exact location and direction of travel;
- C.** Pursued vehicle description - year, make, model, and color, if known;
- D.** Tag number and state, if known;
- E.** Number of occupants in pursued vehicle, with race, sex, and age if possible; and
- F.** Reason for pursuing the vehicle.

V. DISPATCHER'S RESPONSIBILITY:

- A.** Upon notification by a deputy of a declared pursuit, the dispatcher will broadcast the following:
 - 1.** Emergency traffic only on frequency being used by the initiating officer. All Sheriff's Office and immediate agencies frequencies will be notified by simulcast.
 - 2.** Identify the unit in pursuit and relay information given by the pursuing unit.
 - 3.** The Dispatcher will immediately notify the appropriate supervisor, who will monitor the pursuit.
 - 4.** The Patrol Supervisor, via the Dispatcher, will assign the closest unit to assist in the pursuit. Only units assigned by a Patrol Supervisor will take part in the pursuit.
 - 5.** The Dispatcher will notify the Communication Watch Commander, who will be responsible for the following:
 - a.** Immediately take the necessary actions to move the pursuit's communications to another frequency, if available;
 - b.** Monitor and supervise the dispatch function of the pursuit; and

- c. Contact adjoining counties if the pursuit appears that it may cross jurisdictional boundaries.
- 6. Dispatch will then remain off the air unless radio conditions dictate otherwise, except to relay information relating to changes in the situation and/or officer's safety.

VI. SECONDARY UNIT'S RESPONSIBILITY:

- A. Pursuits involving traffic or non-violent misdemeanors will involve only one primary patrol unit in pursuit and no more than one secondary unit assisting unless directed otherwise by a supervisor.
- B. Pursuits involving known felony and violent misdemeanor suspect(s) may involve a maximum of three (3) pursuing vehicles unless directed otherwise by a supervisor.
- C. The secondary back-up unit(s) will remain at a safe distance during the pursuit. The secondary back-up unit's purpose will be to arrive shortly after the pursuit termination. Additional vehicles may be authorized by the patrol supervisor to follow parallel on an adjacent street. Under no circumstances will back-up and/or additional vehicles go against the flow of traffic or parallel side by side with any vehicle(s) involved in the pursuit.
- D. The second car joining in the pursuit will immediately notify Dispatch that there are two (2) police vehicles in pursuit. The second unit may take over radio responsibilities, allowing the primary unit to concentrate on driving. Dispatch will broadcast the fact that two (2) units are in the pursuit and identify those units. All other units should remain on patrol, but stay alert to the direction of travel in case help is needed.
- E. Secondary units will yield the right of way to the chase vehicles, maintain a safe distance and be available to assist in the apprehension.
- F. Any available K-9 units should be notified.

VII. SUPERVISOR'S RESPONSIBILITIES:

- A. The supervisor of the initiating unit must ensure:
 - 1. That the authorized number of units are in pursuit and determine if more or less units are needed;
 - 2. Aircraft has been requested; and
 - 3. The proper radio frequency is being used.
- B. The supervisor may terminate the pursuit if, in the supervisor's opinion, a serious hazard is present to the public and/or pursuing officers.
- C. The patrol supervisor for the pursuit will respond immediately to the location where the pursuit ends and assume command at the scene.

- D.** The supervisor will complete a synopsis of the pursuit in memorandum form to be forwarded up the chain of command for review. The synopsis will include the following:
1. Date and time
 2. Length of time
 3. Distanced traveled
 4. Availability and use of the aviation unit
 5. Primary deputy
 6. Secondary deputy
 7. Additional Units, including supervisors
 8. Initial reason for the pursuit
 9. Highest speed attained
 10. How the pursuit ended
 11. Injuries and how sustained
 12. Property damage and how sustained
 13. Traffic accident summary
- E.** The Division Commander will review and critique the synopsis for subject matter of benefit in training, equipment, tactics and procedure. The original pursuit synopsis and critique will be filed with the Director of Law Enforcement and a copy will be forwarded to the Chief Deputy.

VIII. CONDUCT OF THE PURSUIT:

- A.** The pursuing marked vehicle (primary vehicle) and one backup vehicle (secondary vehicle) will normally be the only ground units necessary to pursue a fleeing vehicle. The primary vehicle or supervisor may request additional vehicles to assist. The secondary vehicle will not follow too closely and will not attempt to pass the primary vehicle unless it is forced to drop out. Sirens and emergency lights will be used throughout the pursuit.
- B.** Caravanning of vehicles during a pursuit situation is prohibited.
- C.** Paralleling - Marked units directed to parallel on adjacent streets in the pursuit route will operate in an emergency (i.e., blue/red lights and siren) mode unless directed otherwise by the supervisor.
- D.** Running and/or stationary road blocks established for the purpose of terminating the pursuit will only be at a patrol supervisor's direction.
- E.** Pursuits for civil traffic infractions and misdemeanors will not be upgraded to Aggravated Assault or other felonies by deputy(s) intentionally placing themselves in the line of pursuit in an attempt to enable the deputy to continue such a pursuit or to shoot at the fleeing vehicle on the basis that a felony was now committed.

IX. TERMINATION OF THE PURSUIT:

- A.** The deputy will terminate a pursuit when:
1. The danger involved in the pursuit is greater than the offense which was committed and/or believed to have been committed;

2. Directed to do so by a supervisor;
3. The suspect vehicle is no longer in sight; or
4. Other extenuating circumstances exist.

- B. If the deputy(s) receives a communication from a supervisor to terminate pursuit, he/she will do so immediately, reporting to the dispatcher the last known location and direction of travel of the pursued vehicle.
- C. If the decision has been made to terminate the pursuit, which is entering another county, it is the Communications Supervisor's responsibility to notify the county, into which the pursuit enters, and advise them of the decision to terminate the pursuit.
- D. The deputy initiating the pursuit will submit a report documenting the circumstances of the pursuit to his/her immediate supervisor prior to the end of shift. Other deputies involved in the pursuit may be required at the discretion of the supervisor to complete a Supplemental Report detailing their involvement.

X. PURSUITS FROM ST. LUCIE COUNTY INTO ANOTHER COUNTY: Pursuits which leave St. Lucie County require the following:

- A.** The Communications Supervisor is responsible for promptly notifying the adjoining counties and informing them that a pursuit is leaving St. Lucie County and entering their county. This notification will include:
 1. Vehicle and suspect descriptions;
 2. Details of the charges; and
 3. Any available data on the pursuit such as length, speeds, suspect driver skills displayed, etc.
- B. The adjoining agency is responsible for determining if the pursuit will be continued within its county.
 1. If the adjoining agency determines that the pursuit will be terminated, the St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office will honor this decision immediately and terminate the pursuit.
 2. If the adjoining agency determines that the pursuit is justifiable, it will assume command of the pursuit once an officer/deputy of the county joins the pursuit. Upon the arrest of a felony suspect, the requirements of Section 901.25, Florida Statutes, will be followed.
- C. Deputies engaged in the pursuit which leave St. Lucie County may continue the pursuit into another county provided the officer has the approval of:
 1. The Patrol Supervisor, and
 2. Supervisor of the adjoining county.
- D. Deputies of the St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office engaged in a pursuit outside St. Lucie County will continue to follow all written directives of the St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office.

XI. PURSUITS ENTERING ST. LUCIE COUNTY FROM A CITY WITHIN ST. LUCIE COUNTY, OR FROM ANOTHER COUNTY:

- A. The Communication Watch Commander is responsible for the following: If a pursuit being conducted by a city police department within St. Lucie County, or an adjoining Sheriff's Office enters St. Lucie County, the Communications Supervisor will attempt to obtain:
 - 1. The reason for the pursuit;
 - 2. Details on the charges;
 - 3. Vehicle, suspect, and occupant information; and
 - 4. Any available data on the pursuit such as length, speeds, suspect driver skills displayed, etc.
- B. The St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office will not assist in a pursuit unless assistance is specifically requested and patrol supervisor approves. Notification by another agency of a pursuits progress will not be considered as a request to join in the pursuit.
- C. The Communications Supervisor will inform the pursuing county that the decision for the continuation of the their pursuit within St. Lucie County is the responsibility of the affected Patrol Supervisor. If it is determined by the Supervisor that to continue the pursuit is detrimental to the public safety, the agency and pursuing officer will be directed to immediately discontinue the pursuit.
- D. The Communications Supervisor will inform the affected Patrol Supervisor of the pursuit.
- E. Once a decision has been made by the Patrol Supervisor, the Communications Supervisor will inform the pursuing agency.
 - 1. If the decision is made to discontinue the pursuit, the Communications Supervisor will request the pursuit be terminated immediately.
 - 2. If the decision is to assume active pursuit, the Communications Supervisor will inform the pursuing agency that once the pursuit is in St. Lucie County, command of the pursuit is the responsibility of the affected St. Lucie County Sheriff's Patrol Supervisor.
 - a. The pursuit should still be limited to a total of two (2) vehicles, regardless of the number of agencies involved during the course of the pursuit.
 - b. Unless officer safety or a specific request from the originating agency indicates otherwise, St. Lucie County Sheriff's deputies should terminate their participation when the outside agency's pursuit leaves St. Lucie County.
- F. The Shift Watch Commander or Patrol Supervisor once given the information listed in section XI, A, 1, subsections a - d, above, will consider the factors set forth in article I. section 6, of this procedure and determine if:
 - 1. The pursuit should be terminated; or
 - 2. The St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office will assume command of the pursuit and actively attempt to apprehend the violator.

- G.** If an arrest is made the requirements of Section 901.25, Florida Statutes, and the Sheriff's Office Arrest Procedures will be followed.

XII. FORCIBLE STOPPING OF VEHICLE:

- A.** While the preferred method of stopping a violator is to remain behind the vehicle until the driver stops of his/her own accord, other tactics may be used to stop a pursued vehicle when necessary.
- B.** If it is reasonably believed that a delay in the apprehension of the pursued suspect represents an impending threat of grave injury or death to any person, the deputies involved might have to resort to the following methods:
- 1. Shooting at the Vehicle:** Deputies are prohibited from using firearms in an attempt to stop fleeing vehicles unless there is an imminent danger to life.
 - a. Firing at the suspect must be consistent with the Office's deadly force policy.
 - b. Shooting at or from a moving vehicle is generally a dangerous and ineffective practice. It should be done only as the ultimate measure of defense of life.
 - 2. Ramming or Boxing-in:** Deputy(s) are discouraged from ramming or boxing-in fleeing suspect(s). These methods should be considered deadly force and will be fully explained by the pursuing deputy at the termination of the pursuit.
 - 3. Roadblocks:** Roadblocks with Sheriff's Office vehicles will not be placed on any street or thoroughfare within St. Lucie County, unless such roadblocks are ordered by a supervisor as a last resort.
 - a. Emergency vehicle lighting will be in operation when a department vehicle is used as a stationary roadblock.
 - b. Vehicles used as stationary roadblocks will not be occupied.
 - c. Privately owned vehicles will not be commandeered to be used as a roadblock.
 - d. Roadblocks will be set up where it will afford clear visibility to traffic in all directions and to all highway users.
 - e. An escape route through the roadblock must be established in such a manner to be maneuvered through at a reasonable speed.
 - f. Remove vehicles and persons not associated with the roadblock.
 - g. Rolling roadblocks are not recommended, but may be used in circumstances where it is necessary to protect a third party.

- 4. Stop Sticks:** Members using department issued "Stop Sticks" will set up a roadblock as prescribed in this General Order and will adhere to the following guidelines.
- a. Use of "Stop Sticks" in pursuit situations.
 - 1) Deputy(s) should position his/her patrol vehicle near the roadway in which the fleeing vehicle will pass.
 - 2) Assemble and position the "Stop Sticks" with the nylon chord attached.
 - 3) Connected or disconnected "Stop Sticks" may be tossed into the path of a pursued vehicle, when it would be inappropriate to use the guidelines described above.
 - b. Use of "Stop Sticks" in stationary vehicle situations.
 - 1) "Stop Sticks" can be used to prevent a vehicle (s) from being moved by a suspect attempting to flee a scene.
 - 2) "Stop Sticks" may be used to prevent movement of a vehicle (s) which is, or possibly will be, evidence.
 - c. "Stop Sticks" are not to be used as a hand weapon.
- 5. Stinger:** Members using department issued "Stinger" will set up a roadblock as prescribed in this General Order and will adhere to the following guidelines.
- a. Use of "Stinger" in pursuit situations.
 - 1) Deputy(s) should position his/her patrol vehicle near the roadway in which the fleeing vehicle will pass.
 - 2) Remove Stinger from case by picking it up by the rocker arms, not the sides.
 - 3) Use dominant hand to pick up by rope with the spool and the middle rocker arm on the rope side of the unit. Use other hand to pick up rocker arm at the front of the case.
 - 4) Place "Stinger" on the roadside with the rope side of the unit facing the roadway. Extend the attached rope across roadway. When the suspect vehicle approaches, pull the unit across roadway and drop the rope.
 - 5) After the "Stinger" unit is run over, remove it from the roadway with one quick, hard pull on the rope.

XIII. AIRCRAFT ASSISTANCE:

- A.** When an aircraft is available to assist, the following guidelines will be used:
- 1. When the aircraft has advised that the suspect vehicle is in view, the aircraft will continue the pursuit and take over the communication responsibility of the secondary unit.

2. The aircraft will continue to advise of the suspect vehicle's location and approximate speed.
 3. Support units should attempt to be in a position to apprehend the suspect when the suspect vehicle stops.
 4. The aircraft will maintain a safe height to allow the pilot or operator to observe the suspect vehicle.
 5. The Patrol Supervisor may have the primary and secondary units turn off their emergency equipment and slow to a safe operating speed, while having the aircraft continue the pursuit.
- B.** Requests for St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office Aviation Unit assistance from a police department outside of St. Lucie County must come through the other county's Sheriff's Office, unless there is a prior Mutual Aid Agreement with the municipality in question. This is necessary in order to meet the requirements of the Florida Sheriffs' Mutual Aid agreement.

XIV. ANNUAL ANALYSIS: On the annual basis, the Director of Law Enforcement will conduct an analysis of the preceding year's pursuit reports and submit his/her findings to the Sheriff/Chief Deputy.

XV. GLOSSARY:

EMERGENCY SIGNAL DEVICE - Siren and flashing and/or revolving blue lights which meet the requirements of Florida Statutes.

PRIMARY PURSUIT VEHICLE - Generally, the marked unit which initiates the pursuit. If the initiating vehicle is not a marked car with emergency equipment, the primary unit status if available will be assumed by a marked car with emergency equipment.

SECONDARY PURSUIT VEHICLE - The emergency unit which trails the primary pursuit unit at a safe distance and which is available to assume the primary role or assist the primary unit if the fleeing vehicle is stopped.

STOP STICKS - Road block tire deflating device.

VEHICLE PURSUIT - A declared and active attempt by an officer in an authorized emergency vehicle to apprehend the occupants of a moving vehicle, providing that the driver of such vehicle is or should be aware of the attempt, increases his/her speed, takes other evasive actions or refuses to stop in an attempt to avoid apprehension. This definition does not apply to routine traffic stops.

INDEXING:

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