

MARION COUNTY SAFETY MANUAL  
ANNEX N - VEHICLE POLICY AND MAINTENANCE PROGRAM

Overview

It is in Marion County's interest to control costs associated with the operation of county owned vehicles. These costs come from two areas, motor vehicle accidents and maintenance costs. Fortunately, most of the motor vehicle accidents involving county owned vehicles are minor however, these accidents are preventable.

This Policy is also designed to define the operator's responsibility for use of county vehicles, equipment and required obedience to traffic laws. This policy applies to all vehicles and equipment regardless of the department unless otherwise stated in writing. This policy is not intended to be all encompassing. Employees who operate county vehicles are expected to use the necessary good judgment that would prevent embarrassment or criticism to Marion County.

Vehicle Authorization

1. The Marion County Administrator shall authorize vehicle use, in writing, for personnel to be assigned a vehicle on a 24 hour basis.
2. Business hour use only vehicles will be assigned for use to personnel by department heads. Vehicles may be used by personnel for overnight basis in cases of emergency with prior approval of the respective department head. This shall not exceed two (2) consecutive days without written approval of the County Administrator.

Marion County's vehicle fleet is very diversified, with motor vehicles ranging from automobiles and pickup trucks, patrol cars, ambulances and heavy equipment. All of these vehicles have one thing in common; improper operation can lead to a serious accident. Safe vehicle operation is the focus of this annex. A successful vehicle management program has four (4) key elements:

1. Support from upper management: Management must clearly express to all employees its support for the safety program. Department heads and supervisors play a key role in an effective vehicle management program. They are charged with the selection, training and evaluation of their drivers. The drivers also play an important role in this program in that they operate the vehicles and interact with the public daily. Therefore, improper and unsafe vehicle operation will not be tolerated. Department heads and supervisors are not only charged with insuring that their vehicles are operated safely, but also to insure that they are properly maintained at all times.
2. Driver selection and training: Department heads and supervisors must exercise diligence when selecting personnel for driving duties. The driving record and history of a prospected employee should be thoroughly examined prior to hiring. The key elements of driver training are skills testing, defensive driving,

emergency procedures and familiarization with county policies. Drivers must be thoroughly trained in all aspects of safe vehicle operation. The safety of the driver and the general public depends on the driver's knowledge.

3. **Vehicle Maintenance:** An effective vehicle maintenance program can reduce the potential for accidents that may be caused by faulty motor vehicles. A well managed vehicle maintenance program will allow vehicles to have a longer service life and significantly reduce maintenance costs. All defects shall be reported by to the immediate supervisor as soon as they are observed. County employees are not expected to operate vehicles that jeopardize the safety of the employee or the general public. Unsafe vehicle operation will not be tolerated for any reason. It shall be the department head, supervisor and vehicle operator to ensure that vehicles are operated in accordance with this plan.
4. **Accident Investigation Program:** Despite all efforts to prevent accidents, they will continue to occur. When an accident does occur it is important to investigate the accident immediately. Accident investigations will be conducted following all motor vehicle accidents. The purpose of these investigations will not be to find fault, but to provide a clear understanding of what caused the accident, and allow for preventative measures to be taken to prevent a re-occurrence of the same accident.

### Use of County Vehicles

The following guidelines are for the approved use of County vehicles:

1. County employees may only use vehicles or equipment assigned to them.
2. County-owned vehicles will be used for official County business only.
3. Incidental stops or to and from home will be governed by the following guidelines:
  - a. The incidental stop is in line with the shortest practical distance between two approved points.
  - b. Any objects to be carried in a county vehicle must meet the following criteria:
    - Be of such a size and weight that they in no way offer any danger to or have the ability to harm, damage, or cause to depreciate any county vehicle.
    - Be normally handled by one individual with the aid of any special loading equipment or any special parking needs as it would apply to the county vehicle.
    - Meals are an acceptable reason as an incidental stop as long as it is part of the shortest route between approved stops.
4. No passengers will be permitted unless they are:
  - a. County employees
  - b. Persons having official business with Marion County at the time of said trip.
  - c. Other persons that may travel with the operator from any approved site as long as the particular trip is in line with the shortest practical

distance between the two approved points and is on an incidental basis only.

5. Privately owned vehicles shall not be used for County business unless there is no available County vehicle for use.
6. If private vehicle use is necessary, the employee will be reimbursed at the current rate established by County Council.
7. No County vehicle shall be used as transportation to and from an operator's residence if living outside of Marion County.
8. An employee's title or position will not be regarded as justification for taking a County vehicle home. Justification is based on the department's mission needs.
9. Only those employees who are assigned on-call or emergency response duties shall be permitted to have take home County vehicle privileges.
10. All County vehicles will be marked as such, with the exception being undercover law enforcement vehicles.

It is important for all County employees to remember that operating a County vehicle is a privilege, not a right. This privilege allows you to perform your duties in an expeditious manner, and also allows for you to be identified as a Marion County employee. With this privilege comes the responsibility of insuring that County vehicles are operated as safely as possible.

### Department Responsibilities

All Marion County departments that have vehicles assigned to them will have three (3) primary responsibilities associated with vehicle operations; driver selection, driver training and driver supervision. All of these responsibilities will be assigned to the department head and/or supervisor.

1. Driver Selection: Department heads and supervisors carry a tremendous responsibility in making driver selections. Personnel that are being considered for employment by the County, as well as those who are already employed by the County, should go through the same selection process. The following are a few considerations that should be used when selecting a driver:
  - Is the driver licensed to operate the vehicle for the position being applied for?
  - What is the applicant's experience with the vehicle he/she will be driving?
  - Does the applicant display a responsible attitude toward safe driving?
  - Does the applicant display proper respect for public safety both on and off of the job?
  - What is the applicant's knowledge of applicable driving regulations?
  - What is the applicant's past driving history or experience?
  - Has a ten (10) year MVR report been obtained for the applicant from SCDMV?
  - Is the applicant going to be given a driving skills test to demonstrate his/her capabilities of operating the assigned vehicle?

- Will the applicant be offered post-offer medical exam or physical? CDL drivers require biennial physicals.
2. Driver Training: Safety training must supplement the driver selection process. The amount of training needed varies with the complexity of the job, as well as the knowledge and experience of the driver. Each new driver shall receive training at the time of hiring and on assignment to a new driving assignment. All County drivers should receive training on the following:
    - The Marion County Safety Manual.
    - Equipment familiarization in an effort to reduce misuse and abuse.
    - Explanation of any assigned routes and schedules.
    - Emergency procedures for dealing with accidents and breakdowns.
    - Pre and post trip inspection reports.
    - Consideration for special training needs such as defensive driving and emergency vehicle operations courses.
    - Annual refresher training of vehicle safety topics.
  3. Driver Supervision: Supervising drivers can be a challenge once drivers are placed on the road on their own. Department heads and supervisors should continue to enhance safe driving habits and attitudes following driver training. The best way to accomplish this is through positive reinforcement. Drivers should be complimented for safe driving and encouraged to continue these safe driving habits. The contrary is also true in that unsafe driving habits should be addressed and dealt with immediately. Driver observations may be used from time to time in an effort to insure that drivers are performing up to the expectations set by this plan. Driver safety is the overall goal and shall be strictly enforced.

All County employees must submit a ten (10) year MVR from SCDMV prior to hiring.

### Operator Responsibilities

The most important responsibility for safe vehicle operations belongs to the vehicle operator. Adequate skill and judgment are necessary to insure the safety of everyone that may come in contact with the County vehicle. The following guidelines are established to insure safe vehicle operations:

1. Driver Requirements: The driver of a County-owned vehicle must have a valid SC Driver's License. Drivers of County vehicles will be considered qualified and approved for operation of a particular vehicle when meeting the following criteria:
  - Possess a valid SC Driver's License in the proper class. Any person who loses their license while employed with Marion County whose job requires a valid S.C. Drivers License, may be terminated, suspended or disciplined.
  - Capable of passing an Alcohol/Drug Test.
  - Capable of passing a driving check ride administered by his/her supervisor.
  - Capable of demonstrating familiarity with the assigned vehicle/equipment.
  - Employees will be responsible for the vehicle assigned to them.

- Employees will be required to obey all traffic laws when operating County vehicles.
  - Keys will not be left in the ignition when vehicles are unoccupied or parked.
  - Vehicles will be operated in a manner that creates a favorable impression on the public.
  - Vehicle operators are responsible for fueling their assigned vehicle. All vehicles should be refueled when the fuel level drops below  $\frac{1}{4}$  tank.
2. Safe Driving Procedures: Marion County vehicle and equipment operators are expected to operate County vehicles in a safe manner at all times. The following are tips to insure safe driving procedures:
- Defensive driving should be used at all times. Always drive with the expectation of having to defend yourself against any sudden situation.
  - Observe and follow all traffic laws and regulations.
  - Drivers shall carry their drivers license with them at all times while operating County vehicles. Drivers are also responsible for reporting any change in their license status to their supervisor immediately. Failure to do so will result in disciplinary actions.
  - Seat belts will be worn by all drivers and passengers at all times.
  - No unauthorized riders or passengers will be allowed in County vehicles.
  - Under no circumstances are persons allowed to ride in the back of trucks.
  - Passing of another vehicle shall only be done when it is safe to do so.
  - When following another vehicle, the driver should leave a minimum of one car length between themselves and the vehicle they are behind.
  - When backing, be sure to check all mirrors and blind spots, and proceed with caution. If available, use a spotter to assist with backing operations.
  - When hauling loads, insure that the material(s) are secure and within the weight limits of the vehicle being used.
  - Extra care should be used during adverse conditions, such as the following:
    - Night: When driving after dark you should; increase your alertness, use headlights at all times, reduce your speed and operate at speeds which allow for stopping within your headlight range.
    - Fog: When driving in fog you should; reduce your speed, use headlights on low-beam and pull off of the roadway if visibility becomes extremely poor.
    - Rain/Snow/Ice: When driving in these conditions you should; use headlights on low-beam, regulate your speed according to road conditions, check brakes periodically and add extra space between you and the vehicle in front of you.
  - For those vehicles assigned to emergency response activities, the following procedures should be utilized when conducting an emergency response:
    - Operate both visual and audible warning devices.

- Four-way flashers are not appropriate for emergency response and shall not be used to substitute emergency warning lights.
  - Stop at all stop signs and traffic lights, allowing drivers to yield the right of way before proceeding.
  - When parking in or near the roadway, emergency warning lights shall remain on for safety. Drivers shall also don their reflective traffic vest when exiting the vehicle in or near the roadway.
  - Only authorized emergency vehicles shall be used for blocking roadways.
  - The only exceptions to the above rules are authorized in SC Code 56-5-760: Operation of Authorized Emergency Vehicles.
    - Texting while driving is prohibited while operating a County vehicle.
3. Accident Reporting and Investigation: All accidents involving County owned vehicles, regardless of the severity, will be reported. Employees that fail to report or attempt to conceal an accident can expect disciplinary action as provided in the County personnel handbook. All accidents shall be reported to the department head or supervisor, who will then report the accident to the County Risk Manager.
  4. Traffic Violations: Persons operating a county vehicle who are convicted of moving violations may be disciplined in accordance with the severity of their offense.

### Vehicle Maintenance Procedures

Vehicle maintenance is an important factor in safe vehicle performance and operation. All County vehicle operators shall adhere to the five (5) vehicle maintenance procedures outlined in this plan.

1. Operator cleaning and preventative maintenance: The operator of the vehicle is responsible for maintaining cleanliness of his or her vehicle, both inside and out. The operator should also conduct routine inspections on the vehicle, and insure that all scheduled preventative maintenance is performed, as required.
2. Vehicle Inspection: Drivers will inspect their vehicles frequently and will report any safety issues or problems to their supervisor immediately.
3. Cleanliness: All parts of the vehicle shall be maintained in a clean condition, especially the windshield. The interior should be free of any debris or trash that might impair the operator. Necessary interior objects shall be secured to the vehicle to prevent movement.
4. Service and Repairs: All preventative maintenance and repairs shall be completed following County procurement procedures. For emergency or afterhours repairs, operators shall contact their supervisor or department head.
5. Record Keeping: Vehicle operators are responsible for maintaining records as required by the department head for the vehicle during the period of use.

### Marking of Vehicles

1. With the exception of the County Administrator, Sheriff, or Sheriff's undercover law enforcement vehicles, all county vehicles shall be marked with the County logo on both sides of the vehicle, and a county vehicle identification number affixed to the rear. All identification shall be clearly visible.
2. The County Council encourages citizens to report incidents of abuse of County vehicles by noting the time and location of the incidents and the number of the vehicle or license plate number. The County Administrator will conduct an investigation on all vehicle abuse complaints received and file a report with the County Council.

### Disciplinary Action

1. Any individual who violates any portion of the Marion County Vehicle and Maintenance Policy shall be disciplined in accordance with the severity of their offense. This may include: termination, suspension, or some other disciplinary action.
2. Any individual who abuses or misuses any county vehicle in some manner not specifically covered under this policy shall be subject to termination, suspension, or some other disciplinary measure.
3. Consumption or possession of alcoholic beverages and or illegally possessed drugs by an individual operating a county vehicle is expressly forbidden. Any individual violating this provision of the Vehicle Policy shall be immediately terminated.

### In the Event of an Accident

The procedures set forth below shall be followed when a county-owned vehicle is involved in an accident. It is the responsibility of the county employee and his/her department head to see that these procedures are followed completely. Each employee operating a vehicle should be familiar with these procedures.

1. All accidents involving a county owned vehicle shall be investigated by the law enforcement agency having jurisdiction at the site of the accident. If jurisdiction should become a question, the S.C. Highway Patrol should be called.
2. If the vehicle involved in the accident is operated by a member of the Marion County Sheriff's Department the investigation shall be conducted by a law enforcement agency other than the Marion County Sheriff's Department.
3. The County-owned vehicle shall not be moved from the site of the accident until the officer conducting the investigation indicates that the vehicle can be moved or state law requires moving the vehicle out of the roadway.
4. If the vehicle is not drivable, it shall be towed to the Public Works Shop.
5. The operator of the county-owned vehicle which is involved in the accident shall fully cooperate with the investigating officer and the county safety officer. If

required the employee shall submit to a breathalyzer test or other test requested by the investigating officer.

6. Within 24 hours following the accident, the operator of the county-owned vehicle or his/her department head shall file a written report of the accident with the Safety Director and County Administrator. This report shall be in addition to any accident report that may be required by the S.C. Highway Department. The report shall contain the following:
  - a. Description of how the accident occurred
  - b. Estimate of the damage involved.
  - c. Names and addresses of persons involved in the accident
  - d. Names and addresses of anyone charged with a traffic violation in connection with the accident
  - e. Names and addresses of any witnesses to the accident
  - f. Date, time and location of any court trial in connection with the accident
  - g. Such other information that may be considered pertinent
7. In the event that the damage to the county vehicle is paid for by the county's collision coverage or by the county, then the employee may be required to reimburse the county for the deductible, expense or some portion thereof.
8. If the employee operating the county-owned vehicle is at fault they will be required to have drug alcohol test completed as soon as possible following the accident.