


NORTHAMPTON POLICE DEPARTMENT		
Administration & Operations Manual		
Policy: Response to Calls		AOM: O-210
Massachusetts Police Accreditation Standards Referenced: [41.2.1], [81.2.4.g], [81.2.4.e], [41.2.4]		Issuing Authority <hr/> John D. Cartledge Chief of Police
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Table of Contents

I.	INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION.....	1
II.	CATEGORIES OF CALLS FOR SERVICE.....	2
III.	EMERGENCY CALLS: CODE THREE RESPONSE [41.2.1]	2
IV.	URGENT CALLS: CODE TWO RESPONSE	4
V.	ROUTINE CALLS: CODE ONE RESPONSE.....	5
VI.	RESPONSE TO OFFICER-INITIATED CALLS.....	6
VII.	RELATIONSHIPS WITH OUTSIDE AGENCIES	6

I. Introductory Discussion

The manner in which officers respond to calls for services must vary according to the nature and severity of the call. This is necessary to ensure the maximum safety of the general public and of the officers themselves. Types of calls can be classified into three categories: Routine, Urgent, and Emergency. The need for the type of response is determined by which category the call falls into. The total number of officers to be initially sent on a call can also be determined through these categories.

The purpose of this policy is to provide personnel with clear guidelines as to what calls will generally fit into which category, thus determining the degree of response and the number of officers to be assigned. None of these procedures will preclude the possibility of circumstances that will alter normal and expected reactions. Response to any type of call requires an officer to utilize the shortest and safest route of travel.

II. Categories of Calls for Service

- A. Under the direction of the Officer-In-Charge (OIC) the number of officers assigned to a call will normally be left to the dispatcher's discretion. However, certain types of calls will require the dispatching of at least two officers. Emergency calls and many Urgent Calls will normally require two officers or units to respond. Routine Calls will normally require only one officer or unit to respond. Patrol supervisors also have the responsibility and authority at their discretion, to determine the number of officers necessary at any particular call or assignment, and make the appropriate adjustments.
- B. It shall be the responsibility of the dispatcher or person taking the call to obtain information from the caller which will determine the severity and thus govern the degree of response to any call. The dispatcher shall pass on this information to the responding officer clearly, carefully, and correctly. [81.2.6,a]
- C. Dispatchers should avoid giving callers overly optimistic estimates of response time. No promises should be made concerning how many officers will arrive or how quickly they will respond unless it is absolutely certain. If a delay in response is anticipated, the dispatcher should advise the caller accordingly. This shall include informing the caller that an officer will eventually respond and/or will return their call in as timely a manner as possible. In addition and if applicable, dispatchers will assure that callers are transferred to the appropriate agency or department. [81.2.6.,b]
- D. The following procedures are to provide guidelines for the evaluation of the urgency of a police response to a given situation. While these procedures are designed to guide officers in the manner in which they will respond to a call, they also serve as a guide for the dispatcher, as well as the OIC or Patrol Supervisor when assigning calls and response priorities/modes.

III. Emergency Calls: Code Three Response [41.2.1]

- A. Emergency Calls are those that require immediate response from the Department. They are critical in nature and will usually involve situations where there is actual danger of serious injury or death.
- B. Officers responding to Emergency Calls will use both emergency lights and sirens, except when doing so would eliminate the element of surprise desired when responding to certain types of crimes in progress, and will adhere to the law. According to M.G.L. Ch. 89, §7B, the driver of any police vehicle, in an emergency and while in the performance of a public duty, may drive such vehicle at a speed in excess of the applicable speed limit if they exercise caution and due regard under the circumstances for the safety of persons and property, and may drive such vehicle through an intersection of ways contrary to any traffic signs or signals regulating traffic at such intersections if they first bring such vehicle to a full stop and then proceeds with caution and due regard for the safety of persons and property, unless otherwise directed by a police officer regulating traffic at

such intersections. The driver of any such approaching emergency vehicle shall comply with the provisions of section 14 of chapter 90 when approaching a school bus which has stopped to allow passengers to alight or board from the same, and whose red lamps are flashing. [41.2.1]

1. Officers must bear in mind that during the response they have a responsibility to the public to ensure that their actions do not create a greater public hazard than is represented by the nature of the situation to which they are responding.

C. Conditions that will define an Emergency/Code Three Response are:

1. Any imminent threat to life or danger of serious physical injury or major property damage.
2. Any ongoing felony or misdemeanor that involves violence and may result in injury.
3. Any serious felony or violent misdemeanor that has just occurred and reason exists to believe that the suspect is still in the area.
4. Any incident that involves exigent or unique circumstances that demands an immediate police response.
5. An “officer in trouble” call or any request for emergency assistance from an officer. [81.2.4,g]

D. Examples of Emergency Calls would include:

1. A shooting or stabbing
2. Serious personal injury motor vehicle accidents
3. Life threatening need for medical assistance
4. Bank or armed robberies in progress
5. Serious felonies in progress
6. Subject with a gun or other deadly weapon
7. A bombing, explosion, major fire, or building collapse
8. Hostage situations

E. If available, a minimum of two officers or units shall be dispatched on these types of calls. Other units on duty should immediately deploy themselves to a location within their area that is closest to the location of the call in case they are to be dispatched. [81.2.4,e]

1. No officer shall take it upon themselves to backup or assist another officer on a call unless sent by the Patrol Supervisor, OIC, or Dispatcher.

Note: All officers who are responding as backup officers should keep in mind that they are no good to the officer they are going to help if they do not arrive safely.

F. Emergency Response Procedure & Considerations:

1. While proceeding to the scene, the responding officers shall maintain radio contact in order to clarify initial information if necessary, or to receive additional instructions. They should also be on the alert for any vehicles proceeding at an excessive rate of speed.
 2. The use of the siren cannot be totally depended upon, as it is often difficult for motorists to identify the source and direction of the sound. Best results are obtained from activating the siren intermittently, and not at a steady pitch, as it attracts more attention.
 3. During periods of heavy traffic, avoid expressways or limited access highways in proceeding to the emergency scene as this can restrict the ability to take alternative routes if traffic becomes blocked.
 4. Upon arriving at the emergency scene, the first police officer present shall, as soon as possible, make a quick estimate of the situation and notify the Dispatcher for the attention of the OIC. If in their judgement, additional assistance is needed, they will inform the Dispatcher.
 5. In responding to an emergency where firearms have been reported, used, or threatened, officers should take all necessary precautions and be prepared to take any appropriate defensive actions.
 6. In responding to the scene of a fire, explosion, or other emergency where the primary responsibility belongs to the fire department, a police officer shall not enter the building unless it is absolutely necessary in order to save a life, or at the request of the fire official in charge, or to perform a proper police function. Responding officers shall not park their vehicles in a manner so as to interfere with firefighting or rescue operations.
- G. In order to have the capability to respond effectively to calls for emergency service, every officer is expected to be familiar with their patrol area including the streets, principal street intersections, and the various public and private buildings in that area. They should know the location of those places that might be vulnerable to criminal activity (such as banks, liquor stores, drug stores, and gas stations etc.) and the best routes to those locations if an emergency arises. They should consider in advance what action they would take if ever called to such locations in an emergency, including their method of approach, their entrance and any possible traffic hazards that might be encountered, day or night, in responding to an emergency call in any part of their patrol area or in conducting the fresh pursuit of any escaping criminals.

IV. Urgent Calls: Code Two Response

- A. Urgent Calls are those that require quick response on the part of the officer, but are not so critical that they could be termed emergency. In other words, an officer's presence is needed at the scene, but the need is not immediate. An Urgent/Code Two Response is accomplished by responding directly to an assignment without unnecessary delay. This type of call will have flexibility in the manner of response (i.e. emergency lights with or without siren). The closest units should make the response in a quick but safe manner. Units responding to

Urgent Calls should be attentive to their radios as the situation may quickly change to a more or less serious incident.

B. Conditions that may define an Urgent/Code Two Response are:

1. Any incident that does not represent a significant threat to life and property or a felony that has occurred without injury and the suspect has fled the scene.
2. An in-progress incident that could be classified as a possible crime.
3. Any incident that represents a significant hazard to the flow of traffic.
4. An officer's call for a non-emergency assistance (back-up unit, potential but not present problem).
5. Officers holding a detainee and requesting transport will receive an Urgent/Code Two Response unless special circumstances dictate otherwise.
6. Any incident that requires a prompt, non-emergency response.

C. Urgent Calls may require one or two units dispatched depending upon the seriousness of the situation and the availability of personnel. Discretion shall be left to the Dispatcher, unless otherwise directed by the Patrol Supervisor or OIC. [81.2.4,e]

D. Examples of Urgent Calls are:

1. Domestic/Family problems
2. Property damage, motor vehicle accidents causing traffic delays, and hazards
3. Non-life-threatening medical aids
4. Accidents involving minimal physical injury

V. Routine Calls: Code One Response

A. Routine calls are those which require police response for the purpose of taking some sort of action, but which do not require immediate arrival since the situation will probably not escalate to critical status due to the time period of that arrival. The majority of calls will be of this type and they will usually require that only one officer be initially assigned, unless the dispatcher, Patrol Supervisor, or OIC of the shift feels it necessary for safety purposes to assign more than one. [81.2.4,e]

B. A Routine/Code One Response involves no emergency lights or sirens. It is a normal traffic speed response. Routine responses include:

1. A call for service.
2. To take a report.
3. Transport of detainees.

C. Examples of Routine Calls would be:

1. Past B & E's
2. Loud groups or parties.
3. Barking dogs.

4. Larceny or stolen car reports.
5. Transport assistance.

VI. Response to Officer-Initiated Calls

- A. Any units responding to an officer-initiated call (such as officer in trouble) shall notify the dispatcher that they are responding and shall indicate from where they are responding. Units will continue their response at the direction of the dispatcher. All units will closely monitor their radios in the event that the situation changes (officer in trouble downgraded to a backup) so that their response can be appropriately modified.
- B. The first unit to arrive at the scene will report the current situation so that other units may adjust their response accordingly. Any units called off, by either the dispatcher or a supervisor, will immediately discontinue any emergency operations and resume their normal patrol.

VII. Relationships with Outside Agencies

- A. During responses to calls for service, as well as officer-initiated responses, it is often necessary to contact the following outside agencies for assistance: [41.2.4]
 1. Emergency Medical Services shall be notified whenever a person is found to be in need of medical treatment, regardless of whether the injury/illness was caused by an accident, offense, or other incident. Please refer to [AOM 0105 Handling Injuries/Illnesses](#).
 2. A Medical Examiner shall be notified:
 - a. When a dead body or a potential dead body is found.
 - b. When a detainee within the department's holding facility commits suicide; and
 - c. In other situations as determined by the Patrol Supervisor or OIC.
 3. Street/Highway Department personnel shall be notified:
 - a. When a problem or defect on a city street, sidewalk, or highway is discovered.
 - b. When a problem or defect of a city sewer or water drain is discovered.
 - c. When downed city trees or limbs are discovered.
 - d. When roads are found to be in need of snow plowing, sanding, and accident clear up; and
 - e. In other situations as determined by the Patrol Supervisor or OIC.
 4. Public Utilities personnel shall be notified:
 - a. In the event of a power failure.
 - b. When damage to a pole or line is discovered.
 - c. In the event of electrical equipment failure.
 - d. When streetlights go out.
 - e. When gas leaks or potential gas leaks are discovered.
 - f. When damage to gas company property/equipment is discovered; and
 - g. In other situations as determined by the Patrol Supervisor or OIC.

5. The News Media shall be notified of events within the public domain that are handled by, or involve this department, in accordance with procedures set forth in ***AOM A106 Public Information Function***.
6. Northampton Fire Rescue shall be notified:
 - a. Whenever a call for service to a fire scene or explosion is received.
 - b. Whenever this department becomes aware of a bomb threat.
 - c. Whenever responding to an accident scene:
 - 1) Where there is known or possible personal injury.
 - 2) Involving power lines, utility poles, hazardous materials, or other structures; and
 - 3) Any situation in which a Fire/Rescue Unit may be needed.
 - 4) Hazmat incidents.

Note: The Department of Public Works shall also be notified when responding to an accident scene involving hazardous spills or fluids.

- d. In all other situations as determined by the Patrol Supervisor, OIC, or as required by Central Dispatch protocol.
- e. Contact to each agency shall be made upon the approval of the Patrol Supervisor or OIC of the shift.