

CHAPTER 120
FELONY VEHICLE STOPS

DISCUSSION: This chapter presents Officers with guidelines for stopping vehicles under those intense situations commonly known as felony stops. Emphasis is on the safety of both the officers involved and the public at large. Few occurrences present more possible variations, outcomes or danger with less officer control than stopping a vehicle whose occupant's only recourse beyond surrender is an act of desperation. Consequently, tactics will differ in important ways from those stopped for traffic violations.

120.1 PRE-STOP ASSESSMENT

120.1.1 Visual Contact and Risk Assessment

- A. Often, only limited or highlights of information involving descriptions of vehicles related to felony criminal activity is given to or remembered by officers on patrol.
- B. Once a suspect vehicle is observed additional information (identifiers, descriptors, advisories, etc.) should be sought prior to initiating the stop.
- C. Risk and safety factor assessment begins when the decision is made to initiate a stop. Communications Division should be notified of your location, direction of travel and your intent to make a felony stop.
- D. Risk assessment should include factors such as:
 - 1. Nature of the offense or why you are making the stop. This is often based on information received from the communicator, personal knowledge or observation.
 - 2. Number of occupants.
 - 3. Behavior of occupants to include movement and mannerisms.
 - 4. Possibility of weapons, their type and method of deployment.
 - 5. Vehicle type. Two (2) door verses four (4) door cars, window tint, vans and tractor trailers each pose particular tactical problems.
- E. Back-up units/officers are to be used except when circumstances dictated by suspects create the need for immediate intervention by the officer.
- F. Safety factors given consideration should include:
 - 1. Back-up availability

2. Cover/concealment for you and the suspects
3. Time of day
4. Traffic flow and road type
5. Location such as business or residential
6. Pedestrians
7. Lighting and weather conditions
8. Coordination of assistance.

120.1.2 Stopping the Vehicle

- A. Pull the vehicle over at a location of your choosing based on risk and safety factors. Location is to be coordinated with back-up units to minimize vehicle positioning problems.
- B. If the suspect stops inappropriately use your outside speaker system to provide directions.
- C. Notify Communications of the exact location of the stop.
- D. Keeping with the content of other sections of the AOM the initiating officer is considered in control of the situation or the primary officer. This includes controlling the movement and actions of suspects, officers on the scene and those arriving. The primary or controlling officer should only change to another officer when the change can be clearly communicated to all officers present. Generally a change in primary officer would only occur due to the inexperience of the original officer or the arrival of a supervisor. Although the supervisor may be held responsible for actions taken at a scene, he/she may not be in a tactical position to assume control of suspect movement and thus, is not mandated to assume the role of primary.
- E. At night or other dim light situations, headlights, take down lights and spot lights shall be used in any combination to provide for safety by concealing officers and illuminating the suspects.
- F. In most cases a more controlled situation exist when the stop can be made on a two (2) lane road or side street with less traffic than on a four (4) or other high flow area.

120.2 ACTIONS DURING THE STOP

120.2.1 Vehicle Positioning

- A. Vehicle position guidelines are based on the "ideal" stop conditions. These are tried and proven techniques and should be used or followed as close as circumstances permit.
- B. The primary vehicle should be in a position parallel to and approximately 30 feet (10 yards) to the rear of the suspect vehicle. A secondary (back-up) vehicle should be parked adjacent to the primary on the traffic side of the roadway. There should be enough space between the two cars to permit the doors on both units to completely open with several feet between (3 to 4 foot space between the open doors).
- C. The primary's attention is focused on the driver and driver's side of the vehicle with the secondary observing the remaining passengers.
- D. When the stop is made and the suspect vehicle has pulled to the left of the road or when there are hazards to the left of the suspect vehicle, adjustments must be made to allow for a passenger side exit.
 - 1. The primary vehicle will still take a position to the rear of the suspect vehicle and observe the driver and driver's side.
 - 2. The secondary will observe the passenger side and assume the role of instructing the occupants in their exit and control.
 - 3. Officers should not consider the vehicle under their control until the keys have been removed rendering it inoperable. Once the passenger exits the vehicle with the keys, the primary can now consider the driver as an occupant and focus on the occupants leaving the secondary to control the exit process.
- E. Suspects do not always stop in the manner and location as planned. These stops often lead to the misplacement of police vehicles. The most common positioning problems occur with the primary and secondary units approaching each other with the suspect vehicle in between the two or a T-bone situation with a side approach by the secondary vehicle. Communication, cross fire, lighting, observation fields, exit control and other tactical problems are created by alternative vehicle placement. In these situations containment is the primary concern until another unit can be properly placed in the normal secondary unit position. The out of position vehicle shall remain in its location the operator taking a flanking position of observation with cover.
- G. Officers should plan their stop so as to exit the suspects into the roadway. This provides the officers better observation due to less cover/concealment for the suspects. Psychologically, the suspects feel they vulnerable and to far from cover to make a run to safety. Thus, decreasing escape or confrontation risk.

120.2.2 Suspect Control

- A. Do not approach the suspect vehicle on foot. Officers should position themselves inside the patrol car using the door post for support. The windshield post will provide some protection and weapon support. For protection from low or ricocheting rounds officers should consider keeping both feet inside the patrol car or behind a wheel.
- B. Only one (1) officer will give directions to control the movement of the vehicle driver and its occupants. In most cases this will be the primary officer which initiated the stop.
- C. Other officers on the scene should not try to emphasize directions or communicate directions with the suspect(s) unless absolutely necessary to control the scene. However communication between officers such as warnings about movement and weapons are necessary for safety. The intended goal of limiting communication is to minimize confusion for both the officers and suspects.
- D. Use your PA system to give commands. Shouting is less effective but can be used as a substitute if the PA malfunctions. Officers should consider the tactical positioning and problems associated with observation and/or relaying commands before using another unit's PA.
- E. The first move is to control the suspects' hands. Order the suspect(s) to place their hands on their head. This position places the hands high and visible to all the officers on the scene. Controlling the hands, controls the suspect. Give short clear orders for any movement such as "stick your left hand out the window" and "with you left hand slowly open your door from the outside."
- F. Begin suspect exit with the front occupants (driver and passenger). The order will depend on police vehicle positioning as to whether passenger or driver side exit is used. Have that person turn off the motor, take the keys and exit the vehicle. You want the suspect to bring the keys so they are not available to the others or dropped/thrown where they are inaccessible to the officers.
- G. To maintain control, exit only one suspect at a time with the others remaining in the car until that suspect is secure in custody. Once outside the vehicle have the suspect turn around slowly in a full circle with his hands raised. The officer may elect to have the suspect remove or open any bulky or long outer clothing such as a trench coat. Even if he appears weaponless, still assume that he is armed.
- H. Have suspect replace hands on head and walk him/her backwards between the primary and secondary vehicles. The suspect is immediately handcuffed, searched and question about weapons and the other passengers.
- I. The exit procedure is repeated one suspect at a time, clearing the front seat first then the rear until all suspects are in custody.

- J. Do not assume the vehicle to be void of suspects until confirmed by visual inspection. Approach with caution, observing the vehicle for any possible movement from within the vehicle.