



BEACH VEHICLES: OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

This bulletin provides essential guidelines and considerations for the Chief of Police when developing policies, procedures, or a training program concerning the operation of full-sized police department vehicles on beaches. Operating emergency vehicles on the beach requires specialized skills and knowledge. Law enforcement agencies can ensure effective and safe responses to emergencies while also protecting the unique beach environment of New Jersey.

Ensuring the safety of both officers and the public is especially paramount when responding to emergencies in these unique environments. This bulletin is specific to full-sized motor vehicles. Review the MEL Safety Director Bulletin, [Low-Speed Vehicle Best Practices](#) for non-full-size vehicle usage considerations.

Essential Considerations:

1. Establish agency policy and procedures concerning when an officer is permitted to operate a full-size 4 x 4 motor vehicle on the beach. Review the available Sample Vehicle Usage Policy as a guide.

Some policy considerations:

- Determine what parameters an officer may operate a 4 x 4 vehicle on the beach (general patrol, response to a general call for service, response to defined emergencies only, etc.)
- Determine speed limit limitations based upon the type of activity (For example, general patrol, if permitted, might have a defined vehicle speed limit, and responding to an emergency might have a separate defined speed limit. The key consideration is that even when responding to an emergency that's on the beach, the speed limit will be drastically reduced as compared to responding to an emergency on the highway)
- Include in the policy the level of training that is required before an officer may operate a 4 x 4 vehicle on the beach.

2. Vehicle Preparation:

- Ensure all emergency vehicles are equipped with appropriate tires for sand driving.
- Require officers to visually inspect vehicles for any obvious mechanical issues that beach conditions could exacerbate at the start of their shift or before when utilizing the vehicle, whenever possible.
- Ensure there is an established preventative maintenance program specific to 4 x 4 vehicles that regularly operate on the sand and are exposed to a saltwater environment.
- Equip the vehicle with tow ropes, shovels, and traction mats, and provide proper training for their use.

3. Driving Techniques:

- Evaluate the need to reduce the vehicle's tire pressure to increase traction on sand that is consistent with the vehicle manufacturer's guidelines.
- Ensure instruction is provided to drive at a steady, moderate speed to avoid getting stuck and at speeds designated in the agency policy.
- Direct drivers to avoid sudden acceleration, braking, or sharp turns.

- Determine if there are designated paths on the beaches and whether there are environmentally sensitive areas that need to be avoided. If there are designated paths, provide guidance as to when it's permitted that an officer can travel beyond the designated paths, such as responding to an emergency.

4. Safety Precautions:

- Require the seat belts are always worn for everyone in the vehicle.
- Be aware of pedestrians, beachgoers, and obstacles. Include specific examples of emergency vehicles that have struck beachgoers or other objects in the training program to help illustrate the danger.
- Provide guidance on when lights, sirens, and other vehicle lights must be utilized. For example, when responding to an emergency, are lights, and sirens required the entire time while driving or only when other vehicles or pedestrians are expected to yield? Are the vehicle headlights required to be illuminated, or are other warning lights activated during general patrol?
- Emphasize the need to maintain communication with dispatch and other responding units.
- Provide clear guidance on how a person under arrest should be transported and if utilizing the 4 x 4 vehicle is adequately equipped to transport prisoners.

5. Environmental Considerations:

- Ensure measures are taken to respect protected areas and wildlife habitats. Include environmentally sensitive areas or protected wildlife in the training program.
- Avoid driving on dunes and vegetation to prevent erosion and damage unless such action is absolutely necessary.
- Provide guidance concerning tides and weather, which should include instruction on how to identify tidal times and known tidal hazards for designated locations.

6. Emergency Response Protocols:

- Coordinate effective policy and procedure development with local beach patrols and lifeguards to avoid conflict while providing the opportunity for collaboration and mutual understanding of roles.
- Ensure clear communication channels have been established with other emergency services, lifeguards, beach maintenance personnel, and those assigned to check for beach tag compliance.
- Develop a contingency plan for vehicle recovery in case of immobilization, and ensure the plan is reviewed during the training program.

7. Training and Drills:

- Provide every trainee access to the manufacturer's vehicle manual and require the employee to review it.
- Require trainees to drive on the beach during the training session, in both daylight and nighttime conditions.
- Simulate emergency scenarios to practice response protocols.
- Review and update training materials based on feedback and new information.

If you have any questions, please contact your Law Enforcement Risk Control Consultant.