



Loss Control Division

of the Alabama Municipal Insurance Corporation
and the Municipal Workers Compensation Fund



Emergency Vehicle Operator: Best Practices for Municipalities

Emergency vehicle operators are entrusted with safely transporting personnel, equipment, and vehicles during critical responses. The Loss Control Division of AMIC and MWCF provides these recommendations to ensure fire and EMS departments in Alabama municipalities operate safely, reduce risks, and comply with state and federal regulations. These best practices outline key standards for driver selection, training, operational guidelines, and incident investigations.

Your department can enhance driver strength and reduce potential risks by actively addressing the critical factors involved in emergency vehicle operations. It is essential to ensure that any procedures or protocols established are practical, appropriate for your organization's specific needs, and consistently applied, monitored, and enforced.



Core Elements of an Operator Safety Program

- Clear standard operating procedures (SOPs)
- Stringent driver selection criteria
- Comprehensive Medical Evaluations
- Training and certification Requirements
- Thorough incident investigation processes

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

Modern **Emergency Service Organizations (ESOs)** should emphasize the development and implementation of clear, practical operational procedures and focused training programs. Among the most critical areas requiring consistent attention is the operation of emergency vehicles.

Both command personnel and drivers must recognize that safe and efficient emergency vehicle response is foundational to the success of all emergency operations. These vehicles transport not only personnel but also essential life-saving equipment. Failure to safely reach the scene directly compromises the organization's ability to protect life and property.



Implementing well-defined emergency vehicle response protocols provides necessary direction to leadership and drivers alike, promoting safety, accountability, and mission success.

SOPs are vital to ensuring consistent, safe operation of emergency vehicles. Core areas that should be addressed include:

- Safe intersection navigation protocols
- Maximum response speeds
- Defined roles and responsibilities for drivers and officers
- Use and limitations of warning devices
- Safe backing procedures
- Response policies for both frontline and administrative vehicles

Note: SOPs should be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure compliance with current laws, best practices, and safety standards. This includes incorporating periodic training, operational audits, and feedback from personnel.

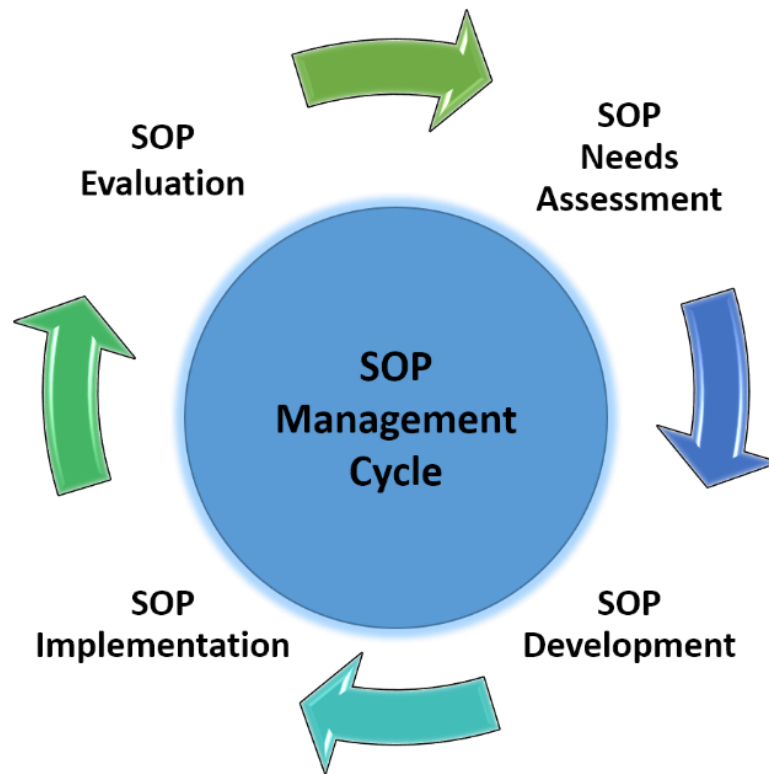


Figure 1: SOP Management Cycle

Driver Selection Criteria

Selecting qualified operators is vital for safe emergency vehicle operations. Departments should assess candidates based on age, experience, driving history, and physical fitness.

Driver Age Considerations –Loss Control Division of AMIC and MWCF

Drivers of all age groups—young, middle-aged, and older—bring both strengths and challenges to emergency vehicle operations. Younger operators may have faster reflexes but often lack the driving experience and emotional maturity necessary for high-pressure situations. Middle-aged drivers typically have greater experience, yet they may become overconfident or neglect the need for continued training and medical oversight. Older drivers, while often cautious and highly experienced, may face physical limitations that could impact their ability to safely operate emergency apparatus.



To address age-related risk factors and enhance operational safety, departments should adopt driver selection and training standards that reflect the unique needs of each age group. The following recommendations are provided:

- **Minimum Age:** Drivers should be at least 21 years old to comply with federal regulations for operating vehicles over 26,001 lbs. Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW) and to ensure appropriate maturity for emergency response situations.
- **Driving Experience:** A minimum of five years of licensed driving experience is recommended.
- **Motor Vehicle Record (MVR) Review:**

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- MVR checks should be conducted during the pre-employment process and at a minimum of every three years thereafter, as outlined in resources MVRC-001 through MVRC-005 at www.losscontrol.org.
 - **Driving records should meet the following criteria:**
 - No more than one moving violation or at-fault collision within the past 12 months
 - No more than two moving violations, at-fault collisions, or any combination of the two within the past three years
 - No serious offenses (e.g., DUI, reckless driving, or operating with a suspended license) within the past three years

Major and Minor Violations: Guidelines for Disciplinary Action

In addition to general driving history, specific traffic offenses—categorized as major (Class A) or minor (Class B) violations—should influence an operator's eligibility to drive emergency vehicles.



Class A Violations (Major Offenses)

These serious offenses typically result in a license suspension and present an elevated risk of liability. Individuals with any of the following violations within the past three years should not be permitted to operate emergency vehicles:

- Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Vehicular homicide due to gross negligence
- Reckless endangerment involving a motor vehicle
- Driving with a suspended or revoked license
- Using a vehicle during the commission of a felony
- Unauthorized use of another person's vehicle
- Allowing an unlicensed individual to drive
- Reckless driving

Recommended Action:

Drivers found guilty of a Class A violation should be suspended from driving department vehicles for a minimum of two years. Reinstatement should require successful completion of the agency's full driver training and re-certification process.

Class B Violations (Minor Offenses)

These include general moving violations such as speeding, unsafe lane changes, and driving too fast for conditions. While less severe than Class A, repeated Class B violations indicate a pattern of risky driving behavior.

Recommended Progressive Disciplinary Actions:

Note: Departments should evaluate exceptional cases individually and adjust actions as necessary based on circumstances.

Disciplinary Measures for Violations or Collisions	
Number of Violations or Collisions (Last 3 Years)	Disciplinary Action
1	Verbal Warning: Documented by the Department Head
2	Written Warning: Issued by the Department Head
3	90-Day Suspension of Driving Privileges
4 or more	1 Year Suspension and Mandatory Completion of a Driver Improvement Course
Any Serious Violation	2 Year Suspension and Recertification via the Department's Training Program

Table 1: Disciplinary Measures for Violations or Collisions

Health And Fitness Requirements

Operators shall maintain physical fitness to handle the demands of emergency vehicle operation.

Medical Evaluations and Ongoing Assessments

To ensure the safety and health of municipal vehicle operators, a structured medical evaluation program should be implemented in accordance with **NFPA 1582**. This program includes pre-employment health screenings, regular ongoing assessments, and return-to-duty evaluations to verify each operator's physical and mental capacity for safe vehicle operation.

Pre-Employment Medical Evaluations:

Operators shall undergo pre-employment health assessments to verify their physical capacity for safe vehicle operation.

- **Evaluator Qualifications:** Assessments should be conducted by a licensed Medical Doctor (M.D.), Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (D.O.), Certified Registered Nurse Practitioner (CRNP), or Physician's Assistant (P.A.) who is licensed and authorized by state law to conduct such evaluations.
- **Medication Disclosure:** Operators shall report all prescribed medications to the municipality. Any potential side effects or contraindications shall be reviewed prior to granting driving authorization.
- **Baseline Assessment:** A comprehensive medical evaluation is recommended before training begins, covering vision, hearing, cardiovascular health, neurological function, and other relevant factors.

Ongoing Medical Assessments:

To maintain health, readiness, and fitness for duty, operators should participate in regular medical evaluations as guided by NFPA 1582 best practices.



- **Annual Medical Evaluations:** All active operators should undergo an annual medical evaluation to monitor any conditions that may impair safe vehicle operation.
- **Age-Based Physical Exams:** The depth and frequency of physical exams should increase with age. (See table below for NFPA 1582-recommended intervals.)
- **Return-to-Duty and Post-Incident Assessments:** Operators returning from medical leave, injury, or significant illness shall undergo a medical clearance evaluation before resuming duties.
- **Confidentiality and Recordkeeping:** All medical evaluations shall be documented and stored in compliance with HIPAA regulations. Access should be limited to authorized personnel only.
- **Preventive Health Measures:** Departments are encouraged to offer or recommend regular wellness screenings, such as blood pressure checks, cholesterol monitoring, and vision exams, to support long-term operator health and reduce risk.

NFPA 1582: Firefighter Health Evaluation Guidelines

Category	Age Range	Medical Evaluation	Physical Examination
Pre-Employment	All Applicants	Required Prior to Employment	Pre-Employment
Active Firefighters	Under 30	Annually	Annually
Active Firefighters	30-39 Years Old	Annually	At Least Every 2 Years
Active Firefighters	40 and Older	Annually	Annually
Return-to-Duty	All Ages	As Determined by Medical Provider	Required if Related to Health or Injury
Post-Injury/Illness	All Ages	As Needed Based on Clinical Judgement	Required to Determine Fitness For Duty

Table 2: NFPA 1582 Firefighter Health Evaluation Guidelines



Driver Training And Certification

To promote safe emergency vehicle operations, departments should ensure that all drivers complete formal training and certification programs for their assigned apparatus if personnel are operating the vehicle in any capacity.

Every employee, irrespective of their experience, age, or maturity, should receive training addressing the legal responsibilities and liabilities associated with operating emergency vehicles.



Tailored Training Requirements:

Fire Departments can develop customized training protocols to address skill gaps for newly hired personnel, part-time staff, and volunteers. These may include:

- A minimum number of training hours to qualify as a relief operator.
- Structured exercises focused on pump operations or aerial device handling.
- Additional department-specific criteria to ensure operational readiness.

This approach allows departments to adapt training to their unique needs, ensuring all operators meet safety and performance standards.

The following courses are recommended and available through the [Alabama Fire College](#):

1. Emergency Vehicle Driver (EVD) Course

Duration: 16 hours

This foundational course prepares personnel for safe and effective emergency vehicle operations.

- **Day 1 – Classroom (8 hours):**
Covers legal responsibilities, communication protocols, vehicle maintenance basics, navigation techniques, and safety considerations.
- **Day 2 – Practical (8 hours):**
Focuses on vehicle control, defensive driving, and emergency maneuvering.

2. Fire Apparatus Operator: Pumper

Duration: 40 hours

This advanced course focuses on the safe and effective operation of pumper fire apparatus.

- Includes pump theory, hydraulics, water supply, fireground operations, and apparatus maintenance.
- Blends classroom instruction with hands-on apparatus operations.

3. Fire Apparatus Operator: Aerial

Duration: 40 hours

This course provides specialized training in the use of aerial devices, including ladders and platforms.

- Covers aerial apparatus positioning, stabilization, tactics, hydraulic systems, and safety.
- Includes both theoretical knowledge and practical skills exercises using aerial equipment.

Certification: All courses listed above require successful completion of a written exam, hands-on driving assessment, and Job Performance Requirements (JPRs).

Annual Refresher Training

Continuous refresher training is essential to maintain a high level of skill and knowledge, as well as to address and rectify any shortcomings or undesirable habits that may emerge. This requirement encompasses both practical driving exercises and classroom-based instruction.

- **Yearly Classroom Refresher:** Conduct annual training sessions emphasizing safe driving techniques, legal considerations for operating emergency vehicles, vehicle dynamics, and a review of departmental protocols for emergency vehicle operations (SOGs).
- **Practical Driving Reassessment:** Require hands-on driving retraining or recertification at least every three years for all drivers.
- **Recertification for Returning Drivers:** Drivers resuming duties after a suspension of driving privileges or after being inactive for over six months should complete recertification on the specific apparatus or vehicles they were previously qualified to operate.

Re-Certification/Retraining

- Required every 3 years or after 6+ months of suspension/inactivity, including a road test.
- **Skill Deficiency Correction:** Implement targeted retraining sessions to address identified weaknesses or unsafe driving habits observed during evaluations or incident reviews.
- **Simulation-Based Training:** Incorporate scenario-based simulations at least biennially to test decision-making and response under simulated emergency conditions.
- **Documentation and Review:** Maintain detailed records of all training and re-certification activities, with periodic audits to ensure compliance with departmental standards.

Incident Investigation



An Incident Investigation Program is essential to analyze collisions and near-misses, identify root causes, and prevent recurrence. Resources available at www.losscontrol.org include:

- **Accident Investigation Form - Sample 1 (AXIN-001, PDF):** Document Investigations and Corrective Actions
- **Accident Investigation Form - Sample 2 (AXIN-002):** Additional Form For Thorough Documentation
- **Accident Investigation Form - Sample 3 (AXIN-003, PDF):** Supports Detailed Incident Reporting
- **Accident Investigation Guidelines (AXIN-004):** Guidance On Why, Who, When, And How To Conduct Investigations.

Please consult legal counsel for additional guidance on investigation processes.

Summary

Operators of emergency vehicles are vital to effective emergency response, with their skills significantly influencing the outcome of these operations. Implementing and maintaining a thorough Emergency Vehicle Operations Program enables Emergency Service Organizations to ensure their drivers are equipped with the expertise and understanding required to handle challenging driving scenarios safely.

Resources and Support

- Alabama Fire College: <https://www.alabamafirecollege.org/>
- MVR Resources: MVRC-001, MVRC-002, MVRC-003, MVRC-004, MVRC-005 at www.losscontrol.org.
- Accident Investigation Resources: AXIN-001, AXIN-002, AXIN-003, AXIN-004 at www.losscontrol.org.
- Please contact the Alabama League of Municipalities Loss Control Division for any additional information.

Legal Disclaimer

<p>NOTE: This document is not intended to be legal advice. It does not identify all the issues surrounding the particular topic. Public agencies are encouraged to review their procedures with an expert or an attorney who is knowledgeable about the topic. Reliance on this information is at the sole risk of the user.</p>
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