

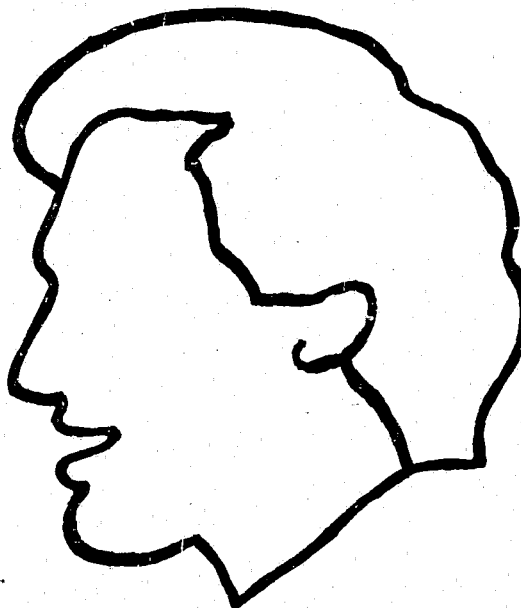
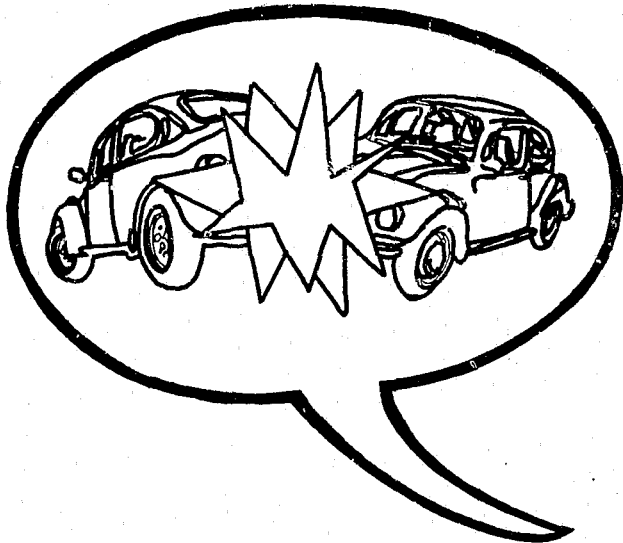
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# COLLISION MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

## PART 3

### ✓ Obtaining Information from People



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Below are the sites, dates and a listing of departments who participated in the pilot programs:

Baltimore City Police Academy - 9/29/75-11/21/75

Aberdeen Police Department  
Baltimore County Sheriff's Office  
Bowie State College  
Brunswick Police Department  
Cecil County Sheriff's Office  
Coppin State College  
Department of General Services  
Harford County Sheriff's Office  
Md. Center for Public Broadcasting  
Mass Transit Administration  
Military Department of Maryland  
North East Police Department  
University of Maryland-Baltimore County Campus

Salisbury, Maryland - 10/6/75-12/2/75

Cambridge Police Department  
Centreville Police Department  
Chestertown Police Department  
Crisfield Police Department  
Denton Police Department  
Easton Police Department  
Federalburg Police Department  
Fruitland Police Department  
Hurlock Police Department  
Kent County Sheriff's Office  
Ocean City Police Department  
Pocomoke City Police Department  
Queen Anne's County Sheriff's Office  
Queenstown Police Department  
Rock Hall Police Department  
Salisbury Police Department  
Salisbury State College  
Talbot County Sheriff's Office  
University of Baltimore

Prince Georges County - 10/14/75-12/15/75

Armed Forces Police  
Bladensburg Police Department  
Brentwood Police Department  
Calvert County Sheriff's Office  
Charles County Sheriff's Office  
Cheverly Police Department  
GSA-Office of Buildings and Grounds  
Hyattsville Police Department  
Md. National Capital Park Police  
Mt. Rainier Police Department  
Riverdale Police Department  
St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office  
Takoma Park Police Department  
University Park Police Department  
Washington County Sheriff's Office

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## COLLISION MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES, PART III:

## "OBTAINING INFORMATION FROM PEOPLE"

## ABSTRACT

This unit is designed to provide the student with information and experience in obtaining information from people; to provide the student with information on interviewing techniques. The unit includes materials dealing with the effects of driver and pedestrian conditions which impact upon accidents. The unit deals with general procedures for interviewing drivers, witnesses and passengers and the type of information to be obtained from each.

## BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVES

Identify the following:

- The basic reporting and investigating activities at the scene
- The human conditions that are frequently contributing factors in traffic accidents
- Suggested procedures for obtaining information from drivers, passengers, and witnesses at the scene, to include:
  - Points to bear in mind when questioning people
  - Behavior often encountered
  - Suggested types of questions to ask of drivers, witnesses, and passengers

## COLLISION MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES III

## Obtaining Information from People

General

Once the urgent matters related to the preservation and protection of life, property, and evidence at the scene have been attended to, the patrolman should immediately turn his attention and efforts to the identification and documentation of the facts surrounding the accident. The major sources for accident related information are the three major components of the highway transportation system: the human element (the drivers, passengers, and witnesses), the vehicles, and the trafficway. The order in which the patrolman should access these sources of information is not necessarily a fixed order. The patrolman must consider each individual accident situation to determine the priority for obtaining certain information. For example, if the accident occurs in a heavily traveled, limited access highway or city street, the patrolman may have to defer any extensive interrogation of drivers, passengers, and witnesses to a later time and better location. He would need to be concerned with expeditious examination of the roadway, and the vehicles before they are towed away. If debris and roadmarks are subject to being destroyed by weather and uncontrollable traffic conditions, this form of information should be observed and documented before extensive interviewing of the principals or observation of vehicular condition. If injured parties are to be transported from the scene, or inclement weather is likely to force valuable witnesses to retreat from the scene, the human element may need to be assessed before anything else.

## Effects of Driver and Pedestrian Condition

### General Remarks

In considering human-condition factors, the patrolman should keep in mind that nearly always some form of human condition is a contributing factor in an accident. However, because some form of human impairment is detected, it does not necessarily follow that the condition was a contributing factor. The following questions should always be asked: "Would the accident have happened if this condition had not been present?"; "Did this condition cause an operational factor or behavior which contributed to the accident?"

### Visual Impairments

Deficient acuity (sharpness of vision) might be suspected as a cause if the accident involved a traffic sign at some distance with small lettering, or the driver says he did not notice or understand a sign. Night blindness (inability to see adequately at night) could be a factor if a driver is over 50 years of age and a dark object (pedestrian or car) was struck, or a vehicle is off the pavement or shoulder, or the driver states he did not see the object struck. Glare could be a possible contributing factor if the vehicle ran off the road, or there was a collision with a pedestrian, fixed object, animal, or slow vehicle. Tunnel vision (restricted side or peripheral vision) could be suspected if there was a right angle collision during the daytime, when the car on a cross street was moving rapidly. Impaired depth perception could be involved if there was a collision during close quarter maneuvers, such as those performed in parking, or a side-swipe occurred during the daytime



on a narrow roadway. Color blindness might be suspected if a driver runs a red light and insists it was green, or identifies a green or red object as some other color.

### Hearing Impairments

A hearing impairment is not very often a contributing factor, but the patrolman should suspect a hearing deficiency if information indicates that a driver or pedestrian did not slow down or yield the right-of-way to someone who sounded a horn, or a driver apparently ignored a train whistle.

### Knowledge Deficiencies

In some cases, a driver or pedestrian may be suspected of having deficient knowledge in one or more of the following areas:

- Traffic laws especially "rules of the road"
- Required evasive action.

### Skill Deficiencies

The driver may know what action is required in avoiding a hazardous accident producing situation but lacks the skills to accomplish the action. Activities where skill deficiencies are frequently found are listed below:

- Recognizing and reacting in a timely fashion to a hazardous traffic situation

- Physical control of the vehicle
- Recognizing the need to "share" the road with others (drive defensively) and responding accordingly
- Being vigilant and resisting distractions (e.g., such distractions as something striking the car; inside distraction caused by passenger, radio, pet; looking at map; lighting a cigarette; outside perception as well as an unusual roadside event; day dreaming, etc.).

Situations where lack of skill may be suspected are:

- A novice driver was involved with less than 6 months or 1,000 miles driving experience
- Driver was driving an unfamiliar vehicle
- Driver had not operated a vehicle for a year or more
- Driver was unaccustomed to heavy traffic.

### Motives/Personality

It has already been discussed how these factors can negatively affect traffic performance (e.g., strong emotions such as fear, anger, characteristics such as exhibitionism, timidity, etc.).

### Physical States

There are many induced physical states which can impair behavior and thereby contribute to an accident. Some of the more important sources of physical impairment are:

- Medicines and drugs
  - Prescription and non-prescription drugs which are abused
  - Alcohol
  - Suspect either or both of the above when the typical symptoms are present
- Poisons
  - Ever-present danger associated with vehicular operation is carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning from engine exhaust
  - It can be the result of the following situations:
    - Faulty exhaust system
    - Vehicle standing with engine running in stalled traffic, in cold weather, with the heating system running
    - In rare instances, chain smoking of cigarettes
  - Suspect CO poisoning when the driver complains of dizziness, headache, weakness and shows dilated pupils, and may have been exposed to the previous situations
- Fatigue
  - This factor can be suspected if the typical symptoms are observable or the condition is offered as a cause when:
    - Accident has occurred after driver's normal bedtime
    - Driver worked unusually long hours before driving
    - Operator had been driving steadily for 10 or more hours
- Illness
  - Many illnesses can impair traffic performance but common among them are:
    - Heart ailments
    - Epilepsy
    - Diabetes
    - Mental illness.

## Interviewing Drivers, Witnesses and Passengers

### General Procedure

One of the early priorities, once the emergency is under control, is to identify the drivers, passengers, and witnesses and to find out just what happened. In general, the following procedures should be followed in regard to handling the people at the scene.

- Identify the drivers. Drivers often are anxious to identify themselves. If drivers do not identify themselves, the patrolman will have to ask likely looking candidates if they are the drivers. If a driver cannot be found, initiate procedures for a "hit and run" accident. The patrolman should be sure that a driver is not temporarily away from the scene, (e.g., taken to medical attention or has parked his car in or retired to a safe place remote to the accident scene).
- Ask for driver licenses and vehicle registrations. Retain these documents until the investigation is complete. If a permit is not available, ask for and retain alternate forms of identification.
- Verify information on operator's permit and registration. This is done by asking the operator questions about his name, date of birth, address, make, year and model of car, and asking him to sign his name on a piece of paper.
- Evaluate driver behavior for signs of impairment (alcoholic/drug influence, illness, fatigue, etc.).

- Interview each driver separately and obtain his account of what happened. This will allow you to evaluate each driver's condition more carefully, and will yield calmer, less confused stories.
- Interview passengers and witnesses as soon as possible to have a basis for evaluating drivers' accounts; avoid processing witnesses with obvious biases and prejudices or sensory impairments (visual, hearing deficiencies). Promptness in interviewing will help to prevent collusion, and will call upon fresher memories.
- Evaluate all accounts of accident events against the physical conditions present at the accident scene.

#### Considerations for Conducting Interviews

There are several points that the patrolman should keep in mind when conducting interviews at the scene of an accident. He should be objective and impartial. The patrolman should avoid letting any attitudes that he might have about a person's race, religion, personality, or present predicament arouse his emotions. When a patrolman becomes emotionally involved, he loses his ability to obtain information in a logical and unbiased manner.

He should use a positive approach in phrasing questions and not start off by saying, "I suppose you don't know anything about this," but use an approach like "please tell me just what you did or saw."

The patrolman should be clear and specific in phrasing questions, and critical of answers received. Instead of asking a driver, "where were you going?",

ask "in which direction were you traveling?" The patrolman should have people show where they were when something happened, or in which direction they were traveling. He should not accept vague or general descriptions; have people estimate quantities such as "X feet" or "X miles an hour."

Ask pointed, but not leading questions; never suggest answers to questions. If a specific response is not forthcoming, an attempt should not be made to force one; the chances are if a reasonable answer is suggested, the individual will agree to it. Rephrasing the question may elicit an answer.

The patrolman should take measures to prevent conflicts from arising between principals. He should keep drivers and witnesses separated until each has had a chance to give an individual account, and use tact and diplomacy to stifle any emotional outbursts.

He should plan a basic approach to questioning, but not follow a strict routine of questioning. If an answer to a question is of particular interest, it may be worth while to postpone the next planned question and explore the answer just received.

The patrolman should not antagonize or badger an injured or confused person--it will not help to get the facts.

Where possible, he should attempt to verify accounts of what happened by comparing drivers' statements with witnesses and passengers. Moreover,

verbal descriptions should be compared with the physical conditions (e.g., statement of speed against length of skidmark or damage to vehicle, stated position on road against location of roadmarks, etc.).

#### Behavior Often Encountered when Interviewing People

Some people may be injured or in such a state of anger or anxiety as to make interviewing at the time unprofitable. In such a case, time should be allowed to pass for the individual to regain control of himself.

People don't often intentionally lie about the reasons or causes of an accident, but frequently create "excuses" (the process of rationalization) which they feel relieve them of the blame for an accident. This may involve the fabrication of an incident or situation which made them do what they did.

Retrograde shock amnesia can cause a temporary loss of memory, back in time, which can be resultant from a blow on the head or severe loss of blood. The loss of memory can be from a few minutes to several days. This could account for a person really not remembering "what happened."

Some people cannot provide useful information simply because they have failed to perceive anything significant about the accident. People who think they saw an accident happen, often have had their attention drawn to the accident by the sounds of collision--they really did not see the accident happen. Some people naturally tend to notice things that others do not. For instance, women tend to note forms of wearing apparel and personal effects.

Young men often notice and recall with exceptional accuracy, the year, make and model of cars.

#### Factors Affecting When and Where Interviews Should Take Place

It is desirable to interview persons near the location they originally witnessed accident events, to aid in their recall. As mentioned before, the location of the accident may preclude extensive interviewing at the scene. If the accident occurred on a heavily traveled limited access highway or city street, there is a great urgency to clear the roadway of vehicles and debris. Extensive interviewing should be conducted at the nearest convenient location out of harm's way (e.g., lesser traveled side street, or exit off a limited access highway). Before leaving the scene, however, the patrolman should at least identify the drivers, take their licenses and registrations and get a brief account of what happened while the facts are still fresh in the minds of the principals. The need to document or collect physical evidence may delay further interviewing (e.g., broken auto parts, identification and measurement of roadmarks that may soon be obliterated). If a delay in interviewing drivers or witnesses is unavoidable, the patrolman should consider giving these individuals something useful to do such as preparing a written account or diagram of the accident.



## Information to be Obtained from Drivers

Most information necessary for filling out the accident report form can be found from observations of the physical conditions at the scene, and the inspection of the operator's license and vehicle registration forms. To discover the facts related to how and why the accident occurred the patrolman will need to question the drivers in depth. A suggested but not necessarily exhaustive list of questions that may be asked of drivers is:

- Where were you when you saw the (car, pedestrian, fixed object, etc.)?
  - This will establish the first point and time of awareness.
- What were you doing at the moment you first saw the (car, pedestrian, object)?
  - Look for statements as to speed--speed changes, direction of movement, where his attention was directed.
- Where were you when you first realized you were in trouble?
  - This will help to establish the point of perception.
- Exactly what did you do to avoid the accident?
  - This will uncover any evasive action taken by the individual.
- What happened next?
  - At this point the driver should describe the key event.
- Exactly where did the collision (or other key event) take place?
  - It is not necessary to ask this question if the answer can be determined from the physical evidence.
- Where did you stop after the collision (or other key event)?
  - Again, it will not be necessary to ask this question if this can be determined from the position of the vehicles.
- What is the first thing you remember after the accident?

- What is the last thing you remember clearly before the accident?
  - This is especially useful for determining the extent of any shock amnesia, if the driver was unconscious for any period of time.
- Who did you first see after the accident, and what did you say to this person?
  - This could identify witnesses at the scene, and uncover any accounts of the accident the driver might have given immediately after it occurred.

In addition to the above questions, the patrolman should ask questions in the following areas:

- Driver condition
  - Was he sick, taking medication, had he been drinking; was he bored, fatigued, nervous?
  - Did he know the meaning of traffic control devices in the area?
- Trip plan
  - Was he late for an appointment or otherwise in a hurry?
- Vehicle condition
  - Was the vehicle properly maintained, the tires, steering, brakes in good working order?

## Information to be Obtained from Witnesses

The patrolman should locate witnesses as soon as possible after getting to the scene. It is desirable to note and record the license plates of vehicles parked near the scene as these vehicles may belong to potentially valuable witnesses. It may be necessary to contact witnesses before the drivers, since the law does not compel them to remain, they may leave the scene. The name, address, and vehicle license number of any witness should be obtained for later contact, if an interview at the time is not feasible. If it is necessary to call for witnesses, the word "witness" should never be used, as this may alarm people. Questions like "can anyone give me any information about this accident?" or "this person is hurt--there is a lot of damage here, can anyone provide any information on how this happened?" are effective. The patrolman should always be alert for biased witnesses with vested interests in or alliances with the driver. Such questions that can be posed to witnesses are:

- What did you see or hear?
- Where were you when the accident happened?
  - The patrolman should verify that the witness's view of the accident was not blocked in any way.
- What were you doing when the accident occurred?
- Where were you going at the time?
- Where were you looking when the accident happened?
- What is the condition of your vision and hearing?

General Procedure in Maryland:

Identify witnesses, give them a piece of paper and ask them to record what they saw concerning accident. It can be elaborated on later.

Get a basic statement. This keeps witnesses busy while you are doing your other duties.

At times, prompt and precise answers from witnesses may not be possible.

The witnesses should be allowed time to remember.

### Information to be Obtained from Passengers

The patrolman should question all passengers as they may have valuable information due to their strategic location in the vehicle. Names and addresses of passengers should be obtained at the outset. They are not obliged to remain at the scene, but will generally stay with the driver until he is dismissed. The relationship of passengers to the driver should be determined, to uncover any potential bias. The patrolman should question passengers separately from the drivers and compare the stories. Questions that may be asked of passengers are:

- Where were you sitting?
- What were you doing at the time of the accident?
- Where was the car when you were first aware that you were in trouble?
- What did the driver do before the accident?

Keep in mind various methods of preserving the statement of witnesses and passengers. Attempt to get their statements as rapidly as possible even with a tape recorder or their own written statements.

Also remember that Maryland law does not compel drivers to remain. As long as a driver performs his duties according to law there is no law requiring him/her to remain.

### Compulsion to Provide Information

The patrolman should be patient with those individuals who do not give more than the required information at the scene. He should not intimidate these people who give minimal information, but note this fact in his reports. Some fleet truck drivers are under explicit instructions from the owners or their insurance company to divulge only essential information at the scene of an accident.

### Written Statements

Written statements or accounts of what happened should be taken from drivers, passengers, and witnesses wherever possible. If a driver or witness cannot be interviewed early, he should be asked to write down on a blank piece of paper just what happened - what he saw, heard, and did - and to sign his name, write down his address, occupation, and the date. When the urgent matters are controlled, the officer then can review the statements and interview the individuals to clarify and expand upon the statements. This procedure will allow for information to be obtained from witnesses who will leave the scene before the patrolman has time to interview them.

### Pedestrian Accidents

The patrolman should closely examine the body and clothing of any pedestrian struck by a motor vehicle, being careful to note the following things to match up with any vehicle(s) involved in the accident:

- Location of any injuries (loss of blood, skin, or hair)
- Location of and type of clothing damaged.

1. The following is a list of driver/pedestrian conditions. Study the list of conditions and identify the type of condition by matching the letter in Column B with the numbers in Column A. Note that the type of conditions are used more than once.

<u>COLUMN A</u>	<u>COLUMN B</u>
<u>Conditions</u>	<u>Type of Conditions</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Being vigilant and resisting distractions (e.g., looking at map)	a. visual impairments
<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Driver ignored a train whistle	b. hearing impairments
<input type="checkbox"/> 3. Driver runs a red light and insists it was green	c. skill deficiencies
<input type="checkbox"/> 4. Fatigue, poisons, medicines and drugs	d. motives/personality
	e. physical states

2. From the following list place a check mark in front of those statements which characterize correct procedures to be followed in regard to handling people at the scene of an accident.

- a. Verify information on operator's permit through vital statistics.
- b. Interview each driver separately.
- c. Interview passengers and witnesses as soon as possible.
- d. Use tape recorder for key witness accounts.
- e. Avoid processing witnesses with obvious biases and prejudices.

3. Place a check mark in front of the following which are acceptable behaviors or procedures by a patrolman during the conduct of an interview.

- a. Use a positive approach in phrasing questions.
- b. Be willing to accept general estimates of quantities of distances and rates of speed.
- c. Be ready to suggest reasonable answers to questions asked of interviewees.
- d. Do not antagonize or badger an injured or confused person.
- e. Compare verbal descriptions with physical conditions.

4. The following is a list of statements regarding information to be obtained from either the driver, witnesses, or passengers. Place either a D (driver), W (witness), or P (passenger) before each statement. More than one category may apply to each statement.

- a. Record and note the license plates of vehicles parked near the scene.
- b. Record statement regarding knowledge of traffic devices in the area.
- c. Record statement regarding working order of the vehicle.
- d. Record the statement of key event.
- e. Describe the condition of the driver at time of accident.

Turn to page V - 20 to check your answers.



KEY

1. 1. c. skill deficiencies.  
2. b. hearing impairment. (See pages V - 3 to V - 5)  
3. a. visual impairment.  
4. e. physical states.
  
2. b. Interview each driver separately.  
c. Interview passengers and witnesses as soon as possible.  
e. Avoid processing witnesses with obvious biases and prejudices.  
(See pages V - 7 to V - 8.)
  
3. a. Use a positive approach in phrasing questions.  
d. Do not antagonize or badger an injured or confused person.  
e. Compare verbal descriptions with physical conditions.  
(See pages V - 8 to V - 10)
  
4. a. W  
b. D  
c. D - P (See Pages V - 12 to V - 16.)  
d. D - P - W  
e. D - P

**END**