

Oklahoma County Sheriff's Office
RESPONSE TO OLDER OR AT-RISK DRIVERS
MODEL POLICY
January 2011

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to emphasize that a sensitive, yet effective, response to the needs of older drivers (ages 55+) is an integral part of the law enforcement mission of the Oklahoma County Sheriff's Office. Traffic stops allow law enforcement officers not only the opportunity to keep all citizens safe, but also allow for identification of potentially hazardous situations caused by immediate or chronic medical conditions. The officer's actions should seek to directly affect any situation that could be viewed as hazardous down the road.

II. DEFINITION

Older or At-Risk Driver: Generally, a person who is over the age of 55, or is suffering from a temporary or chronic medical condition that might affect driving skills. These drivers may have no immediately recognizable medical condition, but may be taking medications that affect the ability to drive safely.

III. POLICY

As first responders, law enforcement personnel are uniquely positioned to provide immediate assistance to drivers that might pose a danger behind the wheel. Whether positive or negative, these efforts can have both an immediate and a long-term impact on the driver's emotional and physical well being. While the safety of the general public is our top priority, we must also understand that driving a vehicle is not just a way to get from one place to another; it is a way of life for our citizens. Therefore, it is the policy of this agency to (1) provide immediate assistance to keep an at-risk driver safe at the time of the stop; (2) give our officers the tools to address the needs of older or at-risk drivers during each contact; (3) support and assist the drivers and their families as they seek solutions to problems they may face behind the wheel; and (4) act as a liaison to the Oklahoma Department of Public Safety by reporting unsafe situations, whether by citation or Medical Review Request.

IV. PROCEDURES

A. Initial Stop

1. The officer initiating the traffic stop should begin to make notes immediately upon identifying the vehicle or driver as a potential hazard.
2. Officers shall:
 - a. immediately make sure the driver and his/her patrol vehicle are parked safely during the contact;
 - b. render emergency first aid, and call for emergency medical technicians, if necessary;
 - c. once the situation is deemed stable, begin gathering information that will help lead to a conclusion to the contact.

3. If the officer ascertains that the driver may be at-risk, he/she shall:
 - a. ask the driver about any medical conditions or medications that might be affecting their ability to safely operate a vehicle;
 - b. ask for identification that may contain an address, or phone number (this may include paperwork in the glove compartment, oil change receipts, vehicle registrations, etc.)
 - c. look for clues that may point to a cause (medical alert bracelets, SafeReturn emblems, etc.)
 - d. seek to contact a friend or family member to render assistance.
4. If the driver is identified as at-risk, and no caregiver can be immediately contacted, the officer can:
 - a. attempt to contact the registered owner of the vehicle, whether by phone or by sending another officer to the residence;
 - b. contact the Oklahoma Department of Human Services - Adult Protective Services unit to direction on taking the individual into protective custody.
 - c. he/she should not allow the at-risk driver to leave the scene until help can be rendered.
5. If deemed appropriate, the officer should document the contact by:
 - a. issuing a citation for the traffic offense
 - b. submitting an informational report and *Request for Medical Review* form to the Oklahoma Department of Public Safety.

B. Training

Commissioned deputies must complete training on responding to and providing assistance to older and at-risk drivers during in-service training. This shall include covering policies and procedures relative to working with these citizens, special communication needs, familiarization with local social service providers who can assist, and how to contact and access these services.