

Guidance for Officer Response to Wrong-Way Drivers

This document provides considerations for police leaders to mitigate a wrong-way driver (WWD) incident. Similar to other instances of a vehicular police pursuit, the decision to respond to and intervene in a WWD incident must be based on the responding law enforcement officer's (LEO) assessment that the potential danger of a collision resulting from the WWD is greater than the immediate danger pursuit would pose to the LEO and the public. The LEO's response should comply with applicable laws and agency policy.

NATIONAL SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION

IACP

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Initiation:
In deciding how to respond to a WWD incident, LEOs should consider:

- Agency policy and applicable laws;
- If known, the condition of the driver, including age and any possible impairments;
- Road, weather, and environmental conditions;
- The time the LEO spends on the wrong side of the road with the suspect vehicle;
- Vehicular and pedestrian traffic in the surrounding areas;
- The relative safety performance of the vehicle being driven the wrong way; and,
- The presence of other persons in the authorized emergency vehicle.

Response Protocol:
When deciding to engage or pursuit a WWD, LEOs should balance the likely risks of pursuit with the anticipated costs of apprehending the offender. LEOs should not drive with reckless disregard for the safety of other motorists. Additionally, ensure:

- Appropriate warning equipment is activated, including emergency lights and sirens in the authorized emergency vehicle.
- The communications center is informed and updated as the incident progresses.
- Often, this may be delegated to a secondary LEO not in pursuit.
- Communication should clear the radio channel of any nonemergency traffic, and relay necessary information to other LEOs and jurisdictions.
- A supervisor is notified.

Tactics for Consideration:
Specialized tactics may be used to decrease the likelihood of a collision. All appropriate intervention tactics short of deadly force should be used if it is possible to do so in a safe manner. Appropriate use of such tactics will depend on agency policy, available resources, and the situational circumstances. Some possibilities include:

- Dynamic Message Signs (DMS) to alert motorists of the oncoming wrong-way vehicle – Notifications should provide instructions to other motorists who encounter the WWD. Instructions might be to exit the roadway, slow down, or stop on the shoulder of the road.
- Air unit support from helicopters or drones to track the WWD's location, speed, and lane of travel information. An air unit's spotlight can be used in nighttime situations to illuminate the suspect vehicle. In some cases, this will cause the WWD to self-correct. This may also help improve its visibility to other drivers.
- Drive as a secondary police vehicle in a parallel direction on the proper side of the road to get the attention of and stop the WWD by using the siren, horn, and spotlight. The driver may self-correct, slow, or stop.
- Cameras from traffic operations centers can provide information aiding in response, including information and updates about location, lane of travel, etc.
- Request assistance from neighboring agencies to close connecting on-ramps.
- Leverage pursuit intervention tactics such as rolling roadblocks, tire deflations devices, or tactical vehicle intervention. For more information on these techniques, see IACP's policy guidance on Vehicular Pursuits.
- Once a WWD is stopped, LEOs shall use appropriate deputy/officer safety tactics when apprehending the driver or approaching the vehicle. (For more information, see IACP policy guidance on Arrests and Investigatory Stops.)

Additional Resources:

- Vehicular Pursuits, IACP Center for Police Research and Policy
- Common Strategies Regarding Vehicle Pursuits of State/Highway Patrol Agencies in the United States, IACP, State and Provincial Police Planning Officers Section (SPPPOS)
- Vehicular Pursuits: A Guide for Law Enforcement Executives on Managing the Associated Risks, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services
- Vehicle Stoppage and Pursuit Management for Law Enforcement Agencies: Enabling Safer and Faster Resolutions Through Policy and Technology, Criminal Justice Testing and Evaluation Consortium
- The Dangers of Vehicle Pursuits: New Emerging Issues, *Police Chief* IACP
- Technology Talk: Finding Solutions to the Challenges and Perils of Pursuits, *Police Chief*, IACP
- Examining Law Enforcement's Response to Lethal Drivers, *Police Chief*, IACP