13.01 PURPOSE

The purpose of this Standard Operating Procedure is to establish procedure and define responsibilities of personnel operating fire department apparatus and staff vehicles and identify department requirements regarding safe driving practices.

13.02 SCOPE

All Sonoma County Fire and Emergency Services paid and volunteer staff

13.03 POLICY

Code Three vehicle operations will be strictly limited to emergency situations consistent with applicable laws, safety, and the well being of all persons. The purpose of Code Three operations is to enable our personnel to respond quickly to an emergency. The safety of personnel must always be a primary concern when driving under emergency conditions.

Personnel shall not respond with emergency lights and siren (Code 3) unless, in the Officer’s belief the Code 3 response will have a positive impact on the outcome of the incident or investigation.

All drivers shall maintain control of the vehicle in a manner as to provide the maximum level of safety for both their passengers and the general public. The driver of an emergency vehicle shall be directly responsible for its safe operation. When the driver is under the direct supervision of an officer or acting officer, that officer or acting officer shall also assume responsibility for the actions of the driver.

13.04 DEFINITIONS

**Authorized Emergency Vehicle:** California Vehicle Code Section 165 (B)(2): Any forestry, fire department, or any public agency or Fire Department organized as provided in the Health and Safety Code, Division 12, Part 2.7.

**Department:** For the purposes of Section 3.4 of this SOP, “Department” shall mean the Sonoma County Fire and Emergency Services Department.

**Driver:** California Vehicle Code Section 305, Div. 1: A “driver” is a person who drives or is in actual physical control of a vehicle. The term “driver” does not include the tillerman or other person who, in an auxiliary capacity, assists the driver in the steering or operation of any articulated firefighting apparatus.
**Code 1:** The assignment shall be completed at the earliest convenience of the officer. All traffic regulations must be strictly complied with.

**Code 2:** The assignment must be handled expeditiously. All traffic regulations must be strictly complied with.

**Code 3:** The assignment must be handled immediately utilizing red light and siren.

**Blind Intersection:** As stated in the California Vehicle Code, Section 22352 (1) (B), a blind intersection is defined as: during the last 100 feet of the driver's approach to the intersection does not have a clear and unobstructed view of the intersection and of any traffic upon all of the highways entering the intersection for a distance of 100 feet along all such highways.

13.05 **PROCEDURES**

**A. SAFETY PRECAUTION**

1. Emergency vehicle being driven Code Three shall be operated within the limits set by the basic speed law, California Vehicle Code Section 22350, which states that no person shall drive a vehicle upon a highway at a speed greater than is reasonable or prudent having due regard for weather, visibility, the traffic on, and the surface and width of, the highway, and in no event at a speed which endangers the safety of persons or property.

2. Warning devices (audible and visible) only requests the right-of-way; they do not insure the right of way.

3. Riding on tail steps, side steps, running boards, or in any other exposed position shall be specifically prohibited.

4. When operating any emergency vehicle you shall at all times drive defensively with due consideration for the safety of persons and property.

5. California Vehicle Code Section 27315 requires that all riders use the seat belt at all times. If the seat belt is inoperable do not use that seat and report it to your supervisor.

**B DRIVER RESPONSIBILITIES**

1. The California Vehicle Code, Section 21055 does not relieve the driver of a vehicle from the duty to drive with due regard for the safety of all persons using the highway, nor protect him from the consequences of an arbitrary exercise of the privileges granted in that section.

2. Emergency Vehicles shall only be operated by department members or authorized maintenance personnel.

3. Drivers must maintain a State of California driver’s license appropriate for the type of apparatus or vehicles they will operate.

4. Any member who has allowed their license to expire, be suspended, or revoked shall not drive a department apparatus or vehicle and shall immediately report this to their immediate supervisor.
5. All drivers must file a Department of Motor Vehicle pull notification form and submit it to County Fire.
6. Drivers shall not move a vehicle until all personnel are seated and secured with seatbelts and in approved riding positions.
7. During emergency response, drivers should bring the Authorized Emergency Vehicle to a complete stop, prior to proceeding, for any of the following:
   a. Red traffic lights
   b. Stop signs
   c. Blind intersections where there is no traffic control traffic light or stop sign in any direction.
   d. Prior to entering a controlled intersection (traffic light or stop sign) when traveling in oncoming lanes or on a painted or raised median.
   e. When other intersection or road hazards are present.
   f. Drivers shall bring the Authorized Emergency Vehicle to a complete stop for the following:
      i. When encountering a stopped school bus with flashing red warning lights and/or with deployed stop signal arm (stop sign).
      ii. When entering activated railroad crossings.
      iii. When directed by a company officer or a law enforcement officer.
      iv. After stopping, the driver shall account with all lanes of traffic.
      v. During non-emergency travel, drivers shall obey all traffic control signals.
   g. Under no circumstances, shall operators drive any department vehicle while under the influence of alcohol or any drug or medication that may impair the safe operation of the apparatus or vehicle.
   h. Drivers shall be familiar with the overhead height, width and weight of each vehicle operated.

C. OFFICER / PASSENGER RESPONSIBILITIES

1. The officer or acting officer riding in the front passenger seat takes on the role of co-driver. While not in physical control of the operation of the emergency vehicle, the officer provides an additional set of eyes and ears for the driver and shall also be responsible for making certain that the driver operates the vehicle in a safe manner that is consistent with this and any other appropriate policies.
2. Officer shall ensure that all personnel on the vehicle are seated and secured with seat belts and in approved riding positions prior to movement of the emergency vehicle.
3. Officer shall ensure driver is operating the vehicle in a safe and prudent manner during response in accordance with departmental policy and state law.
4. Officer shall issue warnings about road and physical hazards to the driver.
5. Officer shall direct the driver to cease any unsafe driving, such as excess speed or unsafe intersection practices.
6. Officer shall, when practical, operate the radio, audio and visual warning devices during response, instead of the Driver.
7. Officer shall check the map book to assist the driver in determining the safest and most direct route to the emergency scene.
D. **WARNING LIGHTS AND SIREN**

1. When responding Code 3, warning lights and headlights shall be used and the siren shall be sounded to warn drivers of other vehicles, as required by the California Vehicle Code (CVC).

2. The CVC provides the driver of an AEV is exempt from Division II, Chapters 2 through 10, including general rules of the road, speed, right or way, passing, and stopping as long as the AEV is operated for an emergency call, and the AEV is equipped with a solid red light facing forward and a siren. Air horns and other electronic sounds are not recognized by the CVC.

3. A siren should be sounded in a manner which will give ample warning to the approaching vehicles, and pedestrians.

4. The use of sirens and warning lights does not automatically give the right-of-way to the emergency vehicle. These devices simply request the right-of-way from other drivers, based on their awareness of the emergency vehicles presence.

5. Drivers must make every possible effort to make their presence and intended actions known to other drivers.

6. They must drive defensively and be prepared for the unexpected actions of others.

E. **SPEED LIMIT**

1. In accordance with the California Vehicle Code, emergency vehicles are authorized to exceed posted speed limits when responding Code 3.

2. The maximum speed should not exceed a speed that is reasonable and prudent for road and traffic conditions.

3. Under less than favorable conditions, apparatus speeds should be reduced.

4. When emergency vehicles must travel in oncoming traffic lanes or on a painted or raised median in the immediate approach to an intersection, they shall slow to a speed that will allow for a complete stop prior to entering the intersection, if necessary.

5. When emergency vehicles must travel in oncoming traffic lanes for longer distances than the immediate approach to an intersection, the maximum speed should be the posted speed limit.

F. **INTERSECTIONS**

1. When approaching and crossing a controlled intersection with the right-of-way (green light), drivers should not exceed the posted speed limit.

2. When emergency vehicles must use oncoming traffic lanes or a painted or raised median to approach controlled intersections (traffic light or stop sign), they should come to a complete stop prior to entering the intersection.

3. When approaching a negative right-of-way intersection (red light, stop sign), the vehicle should come to a complete stop prior to entering the intersection.

4. Prior to proceeding into an intersection after a stop sign or a red light, all lanes of traffic must be accounted for.

G. **EMERGENCY VEHICLE PRE-EMPTION (EVP) INTERSECTIONS**

1. When approaching an EVP equipped intersection, the apparatus should be given a green traffic light. If the traffic light does not turn green, another emergency vehicle may have been given priority or there may be a problem with the EVP device or the vehicle.

2. If the light does not change from red to green, the driver should stop.

H. **PASSING OTHER VEHICLES**
1. During an emergency response, drivers shall avoid passing other responding code 3 emergency vehicles.

2. It shall be the standard practice of the Department to pass vehicles on the left. In situations where passing on the right is necessary, use of forward emergency lights and sirens should be suspended.

3. If it is necessary to pass on the right the driver shall slow to a speed that allows for a safe and complete stop if necessary.

I. RAILROAD CROSSINGS

1. Drivers shall use caution and ensure that it is safe to proceed prior to crossing any railroad tracks.

2. Apparatus shall not drive around crossing gates that have been lowered, or proceed through a crossing with activated signals (non-gated).

3. The only exceptions shall be:
   a. When it has been confirmed by railroad personnel that the gates or signal are activated due to a malfunction or maintenance.
   b. When there appears to be an obvious malfunction and the company officer has left the vehicle and has visually confirmed the absence of any approaching trains in either direction.

J. FIRE GROUND OPERATIONS

1. The unique hazards of driving on or adjacent to the fire ground requires the driver to use extreme caution and to be alert and prepared to react to the unexpected.

2. Drivers must consider the dangers their moving vehicle poses to fire ground personnel and the public.

3. When stopped at the scene of an incident, vehicles shall be placed to protect personnel who may be working in the street and warning lights shall be used to make approaching traffic aware of the incident in accordance with County parking SOP (2-6-3).

4. At night, vehicle mounted floodlights and any other lighting available shall be used to illuminate the scene, with the exception of vehicle headlights which should be shut off when possible.

5. If it is not necessary to park apparatus or vehicles in or near traffic lanes, they shall be pulled off the road to parking lots, curbs, etc.

K. WHEEL CHOCKS

1. Wheel chocks shall be utilized (when so equipped) at all times when the vehicle is parked and not in quarters while on any incline.

2. Truck apparatus wheel chocks shall be set in accordance with the manufacturer’s recommendation.

3. Placement and removal of wheel chocks is the responsibility of the apparatus or vehicle driver.

L. BACKING

1. The operator shall reduce the occasion to back the vehicle whenever possible by using spotting for forward exiting or one way traffic patterns.

2. A spotter shall be used when backing. The operator shall establish verbal and or hand signals to accomplish this task.

3. The spotter should be placed on the side of the vehicle that provides good visual communication as well as the side with the greatest possibility of damage and/or danger.
4. If the operator loses sight of the backer, the vehicle shall come to a complete stop until communication can be reestablished.
5. If a spotter is unavailable, the operator shall get out and look at the backing area in relation to his/her location or proximity of the vehicle to other obstructions or objects.
6. The operator shall conduct post apparatus/area inspection after the vehicle is parked in accordance with County SOP (TBA).