



POLICE SCIENCE

Auto-Related Procedures



Auto-Related Procedures

~ CHAPTER 32 ~

Topics and concepts included in this chapter:

1. Vehicle larceny prevention programs
2. Procedures to follow at the scene of a reported stolen vehicle
3. Procedures to follow for lost/stolen plates and DMV documents
4. Procedures governing vehicle pursuits
5. Procedures to follow at vehicle collision scenes
6. Various tow programs used by the Department
7. Proper way to prepare a Police Accident Report



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Mandatory Patrol Guide Procedures

	Complaints
P.G. 207-11	Preliminary Investigation, Recording, and Transmission of Alarms for Stolen Vehicles
P.G. 207-13	Lost/Stolen Vehicle Plates, Licenses, and Other Department of Motor Vehicles Documents
	Command Operations
P.G. 212-39	Vehicle Pursuits
	Vehicle Collisions
P.G. 217-01	Vehicle Collisions – General Procedure
P.G. 217-02	Vehicle Collisions Which Result in Death, Serious Injury and Likely to Die, or Critical Injury
P.G. 217-05	Leaving the Scene of a Collision
P.G. 217-06	Department Vehicle Collisions
P.G. 217-09	Directed Accident Response Program (DARP)
P.G. 217-17	Bicycle Collisions – General Procedure
	Property-General
P.G. 218-21	Rotation Tow
P.G. 218-12	Safeguarding Vehicles in Police Custody
	Department Property
P.G. 219-09	Department Tow

Required Activity Log Entries for Vehicle Collisions

- Assignment
- Names of persons/agency notified
- Observations at the scene
- I/CAD Event number



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PART I: LARCENY OF A VEHICLE

In a city as densely populated as New York City, a police officer's daily routine revolves around the automobile. Patrol officers can expect that, virtually every day, automobiles will play a major part in their work lives. Every day, officers issue summonses, complete accident reports, and take complaints for stolen autos. In order to do these jobs effectively, officers must have extensive knowledge of automobiles and automobile related procedures. In other facets of your training, we will train you in emergency vehicle operation and in vehicle searches and the laws that govern them, as well as in the proper procedures related to car stops and the issuance of summonses.

In this chapter, we focus on auto related crime and paperwork. We will begin with auto crime (including prevention and detection measures, vehicle fraud, stolen vehicle complaints, and crime related to autos) and then advance to vehicle collision procedures (including collision scene safety), related paperwork, and towing. We will also cover vehicle pursuit procedures.

According to the New York Auto Theft Committee (NYATC), twenty-five percent of vehicle larceny reports are fraudulent. The police officer responding to a vehicle larceny call is responsible for more than just taking a report. **A diligent investigation will uncover fraudulent claims**, along with other instances where missing vehicles, in fact, have not been stolen. Your observations while on patrol will aid in the prevention and detection of auto theft. Knowing what to look for in identifying a potential stolen vehicle is the first step toward making quality arrests. In turn, those arrests will contribute to the reduction of auto crime in that area. This chapter will help in identifying prevention and detection techniques as well as the laws relating to vehicle larceny.

The goal of the auto related crime strategy is to enable police officers, particularly at the patrol level, to gain the expertise necessary to mount a meaningful and concentrated citywide effort to combat auto related crime. The Department wants the auto related crime strategy to be as disruptive and averse to the criminals of New York City as auto related crime is to the citizens of New York City. Vehicle theft is a nationwide problem. Many vehicles are stolen for parts and are dismantled very soon after the crime, in *chop shops*. Other stolen vehicles are stripped for parts, as they lay abandoned by the side of highways - after they were stolen or used in the commission of a crime. In other situations, vehicle owners arrange for their own autos to be stolen and destroyed (known as a "give up") for the insurance settlement. By following the investigative techniques mentioned within this lesson, the Department can reduce the incidence of vehicle theft and apprehend those individuals who profit from other people's possessions.



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PREVENTION AND DETECTION

Vehicle registration plates of automobiles can easily be removed and changed, facilitating many thefts. The police officer, therefore, must be familiar with the *vehicle identification number* (“VIN”), which is permanently affixed to each vehicle. This will help the officer accurately ascertain the true ownership of the vehicle and identify whether or not it has been stolen. The vehicle identification number was introduced in 1954, and is attached to the vehicle by the manufacturing plant. The VIN characters describe certain features of the automobile (e.g., year, model, make, restraint systems, engine type, etc.).

Knowledge of the VIN structure provides the officer with inside information into the makeup of the automobile. For instance, if the VIN structure reveals that the auto is supposed to have four doors, but it only has two, it can be concluded that the VIN has been replaced or altered and a crime has occurred. Extensive knowledge of VIN structure takes years of experience and the VIN structure itself varies from car to car. Patrol officers may utilize the Auto Identification Activity Log insert as a guide to decipher the VIN structure. The zFINEST system may also be used to look up a VIN structure.

Each automobile manufacturer has its own system for compiling the VIN. There are several locations on an automobile where the “public VIN” is attached. This is the VIN that can easily be seen from outside the vehicle. These locations are:

- Driver side of the dashboard/instrument panel;
- Driver side of windshield pillar or post.

Although the VIN is generally more reliable than the registration plate, it is also subject to alteration or removal. Methods used to alter the public VIN are:

- Covering VIN with a computer generated VIN sticker;
- Altering the metal VIN plate;
- Removal of a single character from the VIN and replacing it with a different character made by the counterfeiter and then sprayed black.

When searching a vehicle, never make the assumption that a VIN is accurate; always check for signs of tampering, including:

- Obvious alterations;



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- A scratched or bent plate;
- Improperly affixed or crooked plate;
- Rivets that appear to be damaged;
- Paper or other material covering the location where the VIN is normally found. (Ask the driver to remove the paper. **Do not** do this yourself for tactical reasons.)

Note: Without probable cause, a police officer cannot reach inside an auto to move an object in order to view the VIN. To avoid this form of illegal search, officers should request the operator to move the object.

OBSERVATIONS WHILE ON PATROL

In addition to the information listed on your Auto Identification Activity Log insert, there are certain indicators of suspicious circumstances involving vehicles. While on patrol, at collision scenes, conducting car stops and conducting vehicle safety checkpoints, you should be aware of the following *indicators of vehicle theft*:

- A clean license plate on a dirty vehicle, or vice versa;
- A worn license plate attached with new bolts or wire;
- A new car without hubcaps or riding on undersized spares (“donuts”);
- A damaged trunk lid that appears to have been forced or pried open;
- Vehicle with a shattered window;
- Front & rear plates that do not match;
- A freshly painted vehicle;
- Ignition locks - missing, tampered with;
- Cars with tool marks on the frame around windows;
- Missing trunk, door lock cylinders;
- Flapping or missing vent windows;
- Folded over, obstructed or missing license plates;
- Photo copies of license plates behind plastic covers;
- Out-of-state plates with NYS registration stickers and vice versa;
- Cars showing evidence of tool marks on bolts holding license plates;
- Cars with license plates insecurely mounted;
- Operator appears to be unfamiliar with the operation of the vehicle;
- Operator of vehicle appears to be underage;
- A vehicle that will not pass, or tries to avoid a marked patrol car;
- Unmarked tow trucks and flatbeds;
- Tow trucks and flatbeds hauling undamaged vehicles;



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- Unmarked pick up and rack trucks carrying vehicle parts;
- Trucks with “cover-up” paint jobs;
- Damaged steering columns;
- Drivers who appear nervous and confused when questioned;
- Persons removing parts or accessories from automobiles;
- Persons apparently repairing, or without reason, loitering in the vicinity of a parked car;
- Persons trying a number of keys to open a car door.

Note: These are indicators; they do not, alone, equal probable cause. Several factors, or a combination of these factors, may lead to suspicion that a crime is in progress.

Extreme care must be exercised when approaching a suspected stolen vehicle. An approach should be made from the rear of an occupied vehicle. The officer should never walk in front of, or reach into, an occupied vehicle for keys or documents. Documents should be handed to the officer by the operator, or removed after the operator has exited the vehicle.

PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

The NYPD has developed specific strategies to address property crimes. As part of this effort, the Department has stepped up initiatives to combat auto theft. These strategies include using specially trained plainclothes officers, VIN etching for participating car owners and decal programs such as Combat Auto Theft (CAT), Commuter (CAT), Help End Auto Theft (HEAT), and Taxi/Livery Robbery Inspection Program (TRIP). Officers also conduct vehicle checkpoints and directly patrol areas known to attract car thieves. These programs are available to all communities and are offered throughout every precinct in the city. A person interested in becoming involved in these programs should contact the precinct’s crime prevention officer.

Combat Auto Theft (C.A.T.) Program



The Combat Auto Theft Program (C.A.T.) is designed to deter auto larceny, and assist you in the identification and recovery of stolen vehicles. A "C.A.T." sticker is attached to the rear side windows of an auto. The stickers are depicted with yellow shields identifying the precinct and an ID Number. The owner signs an authorization



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form, which allows you to stop their auto during the hours of 1:00 am until 5:00 am. The person stopped need only show proper identification.

Commuter (C.A.T.) Program



This program is set specifically for those residents who commute and leave their auto parked for the day. This is the same as the C.A.T. program except the hours that a vehicle may be stopped are from 10 am until 4 pm. This program also works by placing stickers on a vehicle's window.

Help End Auto Theft (H.E.A.T.) Program



H.E.A.T. is a citywide volunteer program to combat auto theft. In order to participate, a person must be a New York City resident, a registered owner of a motor vehicle, and above the age of forty (40). When a person registers for this program, two decals are placed on their vehicle. The decals inform the police that anyone driving the vehicle that is apparently under the age of twenty-five (25) may be doing so without the owner's consent. It authorizes you to stop and check the vehicle. H.E.A.T. is in effect 24 hours a day.

Taxi/Livery Robbery Inspection Program (T.R.I.P.)



T.R.I.P. was implemented in an effort to promote the safety of taxi and livery drivers throughout New York City. It is a voluntary program, which encompasses a preventive police response to crimes against taxi and livery drivers, by authorizing safety checks of participating vehicles that display Taxi/Livery Robbery Inspection Program decals.

All members of the service on patrol, including those in civilian clothes, upon observing a taxi/livery bearing a T.R.I.P. decal may briefly stop and visually inspect that vehicle. If the driver consents, a visual inspection may include opening the doors of the passenger compartment of the vehicle. However, vehicle occupants MAY NOT be removed from the vehicle, absent independent factors that cause the officers



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conducting the stop to fear for their safety. Therefore, “visual inspection” of the vehicle **SHALL NOT** include the routine removal of passengers from the vehicle or vehicle searches. Furthermore, passengers wishing to leave WILL NOT be asked for identification or otherwise detained absent factors leading an officer to reasonably suspect that a crime is being, has been or is about to be committed by the passenger. Passengers WILL be frisked only when such reasonable suspicion of criminal activity exists and the crime suspected is violent in nature (i.e., robbery) or if not a violent crime, the officer develops independent reasonable suspicion that the passenger is armed with a weapon. If passengers are detained and/or frisked, a **STOP REPORT** will be prepared as per Patrol Guide Procedure 212-11, “Investigative Encounters”.

Officers will record Taxi/Livery Robbery Inspection Program stops with a detailed Activity Log entry, including the name and driver/hack license number of the driver. Also the Activity Log entry will include the make, model, color, year and vehicle registration number of the vehicle stopped.

PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION AND RECORDING OF A STOLEN VEHICLE

A complainant, present at a precinct command, or other Department facility to report a stolen vehicle, must be transported by Department vehicle to the place of occurrence, or be requested to await the arrival of a uniformed member(s) of the service at the location where the crime occurred. The assigned uniformed member of the service will then conduct a preliminary investigation at the scene and enter the results in the details section of the **COMPLAINT REPORT WORKSHEET**. The results may include the presence of broken glass or a “popped” vehicle lock left at the scene, the license plate number of the auto that is now parked in the spot of the theft (if any), as well as the plate numbers of the cars parked in front and behind the vehicle.

Note: In situations where it is not feasible to either transport or meet a complainant at the location of a reported vehicle theft (e.g., when the date of theft and the reporting date may be days or weeks apart), the need for an RMP canvass will be left to the discretion of the desk officer. A *complaint for a stolen vehicle must **never** be taken over the phone.*

The complainant must be given a **VEHICLE THEFT PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION REPORT** and **VEHICLE THEFT SUPPORTING DEPOSITION** to prepare and sign. If the complainant is unable to prepare the forms, the investigating officer will prepare them. If the complainant refuses to prepare the reports, note facts on the face of the reports and sign them. *Refusal to sign these reports does **not** preclude the officer from taking the complaint.*