

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF POLICE

SPECIAL ORDER NO. 5

July 1, 2025

APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF POLICE COMMISSIONERS ON

July 1, 2025

**SUBJECT: INITIATION OF A VEHICLE PURSUIT – RENAMED AND REVISED; AND, AIR SUPPORT/TRACKING A PURSUIT – REVISED**

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this Order is to revise the tracking mode procedures during a vehicle pursuit regarding the responsibilities of officers, supervisors, and Air Support Division personnel. In addition, this Order adds the task of monitoring a suspect’s vehicle by an air unit after the discontinuance of a vehicle pursuit.

**PROCEDURE:**

**I. INITIATION OF A VEHICLE PURSUIT – RENAMED AND REVISED.**

Department Manual Section 1/555.10, *Initiation of a Vehicle Pursuit*, has been renamed, *Factors In Initiating a Vehicle Pursuit (Balance Test)*, and revised. The renamed manual section is attached with revisions in italics.

**II. AIR SUPPORT/TRACKING A PURSUIT – REVISED.** Department Manual Section 4/205.15, *Air Support/Tracking a Pursuit*, has been revised and is attached with the revisions in italics.

**AMENDMENTS:** This Order amends Sections 1/555.10 and 4/205.15 of the Department Manual.

**AUDIT RESPONSIBILITY:** The Commanding Officer, Audit Division, shall review this directive and determine whether an audit or inspection shall be conducted in accordance with Department Manual Section 0/080.30.



JIM McDONNELL  
Chief of Police

Attachments

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**555.10 FACTORS IN INITIATING A VEHICLE PURSUIT (*BALANCE TEST*).** Officers shall not initiate a pursuit based only on an infraction, misdemeanor evading (including failure to yield), or reckless driving in response to enforcement action taken by Department personnel.

Officers may pursue felons and misdemeanants, including law violators who exhibit behaviors of driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol. If reasonable suspicion or probable cause exists that a misdemeanor (with the exception of misdemeanor evading or reckless driving in response to enforcement action by Department personnel) or felony has occurred, is occurring, or is about to occur, employees may pursue a suspect vehicle.

Unmarked units shall not engage in a pursuit. Dual-purpose, hybrid vehicles, and motorcycles may engage in a vehicle pursuit; however, the unit shall relinquish the role of primary unit when a marked black and white vehicle arrives on scene *and activates its emergency equipment*.

***Officer's Responsibilities.*** In order to diminish the likelihood of a pursuit, officers intending to stop a vehicle shall, when practicable, *position their vehicle* within close proximity to the *suspect* vehicle before attempting the stop. When circumstances indicate a high potential for a pursuit (e.g., felony want on vehicle, possible stolen vehicle, felony suspect), officers shall determine the availability and estimated time of arrival of an air unit and, if tactically possible, wait for its arrival prior to initiating the vehicle stop. Additionally, officers should request a back-up unit *for stops on vehicles with a high potential for fleeing*.

***Pursuit Tracking.*** Upon arrival, air units shall *immediately* assume responsibility for tracking a suspect's vehicle *if no inhibiting factors exist (e.g., visibility, restricted air space, terrain)*. During this tracking mode, authorized ground units shall continue their Code Three (*i.e., forward-facing red light and siren*) response, but should reduce their speed and, if reasonable, maintain a position out of the line-of-sight of the suspect's vehicle, to maximize public safety. The Department shall make every effort to provide immediate supervisory oversight at the beginning of the pursuit and through its termination.

***Balance Test for Initiating a Pursuit.*** Officers must also weigh the seriousness of the offense against the potential dangers to themselves or members of the community and should consider the following factors when assessing whether to initiate a pursuit:

- Whether there is an unreasonable risk to the public's safety, to the pursuing officers' safety or the safety of the occupant(s) in the fleeing vehicle;
- The speed of the fleeing vehicle, relative to other roadway conditions and factors;
- Whether vehicular and/or pedestrian traffic safety is unreasonably compromised;
- The traffic conditions: volume of vehicular traffic, volume of pedestrian traffic, and road conditions;
- Nature of the area of the pursuit: residential, commercial, or rural;
- Whether the suspect can be apprehended at a later time;

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- If weather conditions such as rain, fog, snow, etc., create an unreasonable risk of injury to the public or the pursuing officers;
- The seriousness of the crime and its relationship to community safety;
- Whether the lack or quality of communication between the primary unit and Communications Division or the primary unit and a supervisor causes an unreasonable risk to the public; and,
- The familiarity of the primary pursuing unit with the area of the pursuit.

The same liability and potential danger inherent in a vehicle pursuit *are* also present when following a vehicle. Officers shall not violate the rules of the road, (e.g., Division 11 of the California Vehicle Code), when following a vehicle. Exemption from provisions of the Vehicle Code (Division 11) is granted only when officers sound a siren as may be reasonably necessary and the officer's vehicle displays a lighted red lamp visible from the front. The decision whether or not to initiate a pursuit should be made as soon as it is clearly evident that the law violator is intending to flee. Officers shall not use "following" as a substitute for initiating a pursuit.

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**205.15 AIR SUPPORT/TRACKING A PURSUIT.**

***Tracking Mode Defined.*** *Tracking Mode is a tactic utilized during a vehicle pursuit, where the air unit is overhead and actively maintains a line of sight of a suspect who is fleeing in a motor vehicle. The intent of Tracking Mode is to compel the suspect to reduce speed or voluntarily stop. The air unit's role in tracking a suspect's vehicle is a crucial law enforcement tool designed to enhance public and officer safety. It helps reduce the intensity of the suspect's flight while also providing an effective alternative to terminating the pursuit.*

***Air Unit's Responsibilities.*** *When an air unit arrives at the scene of a following, the air unit shall assess the situation. If a pursuit has already been initiated (or upon initiation of a pursuit), the air unit shall:*

- *Initiate tracking without delay, if no issue(s) exist (e.g., reduced or poor visibility, restricted air space, terrain);*

***Note:*** *The pursuit of an armed or felonious suspect does not prevent the initiation of tracking; however, an authorized ground unit may engage in a pursuit of the suspect's vehicle based on the totality of circumstances.*

- *Utilize the "Night Sun" (spotlight) while tracking during the hours of darkness, unless it is deemed tactically unsafe by the primary unit, Tactical Flight Officer, or supervisor;*
- *Coordinate tracking with ground units;*
- *Assume pursuit broadcast responsibilities during Tracking Mode;*
- *Advise the ground units regarding the suspect's actions and applicable tactical considerations;*
- *Advise any non-Department aircraft that may be in the vicinity of the pursuit that the Department's air unit is in Tracking Mode; and,*
- *Respond, as practicable, to any other requests from the Incident Commander or watch commander.*

***Note:*** *Should the situation dictate the air unit's discontinuance of tracking, (e.g., visibility, restricted air space, aircraft mechanical issues), the air unit shall notify Communications Division and the Incident Commander of the circumstances.*

***Ground Unit's Responsibilities.*** *When an air unit initiates tracking of a vehicle pursuit, ground units in a pursuit package shall:*

- *Assess the situation with respect to the balance test [pursuant to Department Manual Section (DMS) 4/205.17, Continuation/Termination of the Pursuit];*
- *Continue Code Three (forward-facing red light and siren), but reduce their speed;*
- *Remain in close proximity to the suspect's vehicle, but out of the suspect's line of sight;*
- *Attempt to maintain their positions within the pursuit package; and,*
- *Broadcast pertinent information to assist the air unit (e.g., pursuit position changes).*

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*Note: A pursuit package refers to the primary, secondary, supervisor, and any additional authorized units in a vehicle pursuit (pursuant to DMS 4/205.10, Control of a Vehicle Pursuit).*

*Note: Ground units shall **not** parallel the suspect's vehicle during tracking mode.*

**Supervisor's (Incident Commander) Responsibilities.** During tracking, the assigned supervisor shall:

- *Notify Communications Division of their response and monitor the radio frequency for updated information from ground and the air unit(s); and,*
- *Continuously assess the situation, applying the balance test.*

*Note: A supervisor may direct units to re-engage the pursuit of a suspect's vehicle based on the totality of circumstances (e.g., tactical situation, the need to take immediate action).*

**Watch Commander's Responsibilities:** During the tracking of a suspect's vehicle, affected watch commanders shall:

- *Maintain situational awareness of the incident;*
- *Monitor the radio frequency for updated information from ground and air units involved in the incident; and,*
- *Apply the balance test in determining whether to allow the pursuit to continue (pursuant to DMS 4/205.17, Continuation/Termination of the Pursuit).*

**Re-engaging a Pursued Vehicle.** When tracking does not produce the desired result of slowing the suspect's driving, or the suspect's driving actions are contributing to an increasingly hazardous situation, *the primary unit or assigned supervisor shall apply the balance test and assess the situation to determine whether to terminate the pursuit or relinquish the pursuit to another law enforcement agency (e.g., California Highway Patrol).*

*Units may re-engage in a pursuit of the suspect's vehicle if exigent circumstances exist or in instances where:*

- *The pursuit is slow moving; and,*
- *The suspect's driving actions do not pose a serious risk to the public; or,*
- *A Vehicle Intervention Technique (VIT) is forthcoming, with a supervisor's approval.*

*Note: The approval of the assigned supervisor or watch commander during the tracking mode is required to re-engage the pursuit of the vehicle.*

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***Monitoring Mode Defined.*** *Monitoring Mode occurs when the air unit maintains a visual awareness of the suspect's vehicle and location **after** a vehicle pursuit or tracking has terminated.*

***Note:*** *The watch commander or assigned supervisor may request the air unit to monitor the suspect vehicle to provide ongoing situational awareness to ground units, increase the potential of later apprehending the suspect, or to facilitate the return of stolen property. The watch commander or assigned supervisor shall continually assess the necessity of monitoring and advise the air unit.*

***Air Unit's Responsibilities.*** *During Monitoring Mode, the air unit shall:*

- *Minimize its presence (e.g., gaining altitude, changing its flight profile, and, turning off the Night Sun during hours of darkness); and,*
- *Observe and report the suspect's driving behavior.*

***Ground Unit's Responsibilities.*** *During Monitoring Mode, the ground units shall:*

- *Discontinue their Code Three response by deactivating their lights and sirens and obeying the rules of the road; and,*
- *No longer follow the suspect vehicle.*

***Termination of Monitoring Mode.*** *The following are considerations for terminating the monitoring of the suspect's vehicle by the air unit:*

- *The vehicle is no longer traveling within the City limits;*
- *The call load or calls of a higher priority have redirected the air unit to other incidents; or,*
- *It has been determined by the watch commander or assigned supervisor that the suspect can be apprehended at a later time.*

***Note:*** *The watch commander or assigned supervisor shall remain alert to the Monitoring Mode and determine if there is a continued need for monitoring. The assigned supervisor or watch commander shall notify the air unit via Communications Division whether to continue or terminate monitoring.*