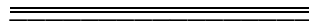
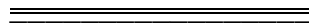


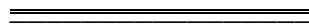
**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**



Reducing Fleet Accidents Through Training



**An Administrative Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**



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September 2011**

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to determine if fleet vehicle accidents can be reduced through driver training. Reducing fleet vehicle accidents can reduce the number of officers injured or killed each year. Driver training is one of the most overlooked aspects of police training. The researcher will review the types of training already in place across the country to determine which types would be effective in reducing fleet vehicle accidents. The research found that a vast amount of officers are injured or killed in on-duty automobile accidents. Departments have reduced the number of automobile accidents involving police officers by implementing driving training programs. Method of inquiry for this research was a driver training survey completed by officers from different departments throughout the state of Texas. The researcher recommends that departments that do not have training programs in place should reevaluate that decision and begin analyzing what type of program will work best for them.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education (TCLEOSE), all peace officers who complete the Basic Peace Officer Academy must successfully complete the Professional Police Driving module of the basic academy. The course curriculum for this section only lists five areas that a student must demonstrate proficiency in. The student must be able to demonstrate proper road position, weight transfer control, throttle control, braking, and steering accuracy while performing a series of driving exercises. They must be able to rapidly displace the vehicle, left or right, or stop upon command on a marked course. The student must demonstrate the proper techniques for efficient braking when coming to a complete stop, prior to a turning movement, and in an emergency. They must be able to regain control of the vehicle during a front skid. Last, they must be able to safely control a vehicle while operating under emergency conditions (TCLEOSE, 2010).

The Commission does not specify how many hours are to be spent on classroom theory and techniques and how many hours will be spent actually driving. Even if the academy were to use all the available hours in a practical driving training, this would only give the new police officer a basic knowledge of police vehicle operation. The operation of the modern police patrol vehicle is no simple task; officers are expected to operate the vehicle and the emergency equipment, along with a two-way radio, radar, video camera, and even a mobile data terminal. Officers spend most of their time in a patrol vehicle, yet, in many departments, they get little or no training for the operation of those vehicles.

The purpose of this research is to show there is a need for continuing driver training to reduce fleet vehicle accidents. The cost of fleet vehicle accidents is staggering. In 1989, the Bakersfield, California police department had 8 lawsuits filed against it. Settlement fees were paid out in the amount of \$38,076. The Plymouth, NH, police department, a department with only ten sworn officers, paid out over \$110,000 between 1988 and 1991 in workman's compensation resulting from crash related injuries. In 1990, the Des Moines, Iowa police department paid \$692,500 in settlement costs. That same year the Eatontown, New Jersey police department lost 1760 man-hours due to patrol car crashes. From 1988 to 1991, municipal police agencies reported their average worker's compensation benefits paid each year per agency was \$117,190 (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 1995).

The most common type of training for police officers is pursuit driving; while this type of training is very beneficial, it is important to realize that only 11.2% of officer involved crashes in which injuries occurred were during pursuits. The majority of accidents, 67.5%, occurred during normal patrol. The remaining 21.3% of officer-involved crashes occurred during emergency vehicle operations (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 1995).

Officers not only need to be trained in pursuit driving techniques but also in basic emergency vehicle operations and in training that stresses knowledge of the vehicle's capabilities and good decision making skills such as low speed, high stress driving.

If training can reduce fleet vehicle accidents, it is important to identify the types of training that would be the most beneficial. Through surveys of departments and individual officers, along with TCLEOSE licensed academies, information on types of

training being provided to officers and also the types of training mandated by department policies will be reviewed. With this information, along with research into studies of effective driver training programs in law enforcement, it is believed that it will be shown that driver training can reduce the number of fleet vehicle accidents.

Reducing fleet vehicle accidents is very important for police departments of all sizes. A reduction in accidents will save lives of the police officers and citizens. It will reduce the number of injury accidents and property claims. Another major factor in fleet vehicle accidents is departmental liability in failing to train its officers. One study claimed, "Recent court decisions have stated that a failure to train may show deliberate indifference to the rights of the citizens of the community" (Beach, 1993, p.11). If one officer can avoid an accident through additional training, then the cost of that training would be justified and all law enforcement would benefit. The method of inquiry includes a review of articles, journals, personal interviews, and a survey from different departments around the state. The researcher anticipates that it will be shown that driver training is a cost-effective way to reduce accidents, increase officer safety, and decrease departmental liability.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are numerous articles about police driving, but in order to focus on the need for additional training, it is necessary to concentrate on when and where accidents occur, the types of training available to police officers, and the departments they work for. Many officers only receive emergency vehicle operation training in the police academy. Also, it is common that the vehicles used to conduct this type of training are not equipped with all the equipment that the officers must operate in real world driving

situations, which means that not only does the operation of the equipment distract the driver but, many times, the equipment placement restricts the driver's field of view.

The researcher intends to review articles, journals, books, and periodicals, along with surveys and personal interviews to discover new trends in post academy driver training, not only in Texas, but also in other states, and how this training can reduce fleet vehicle accidents. Driver training is necessary for police agencies statewide. The training needs to be both classroom and actual behind the wheel vehicle operation. Officers need to be familiar with their equipment and must realize the effects of outside influences on their ability to safely operate their vehicles. They must also know their personal limitations when it comes to driving. This training is necessary because of the large number of officers killed in accidents.

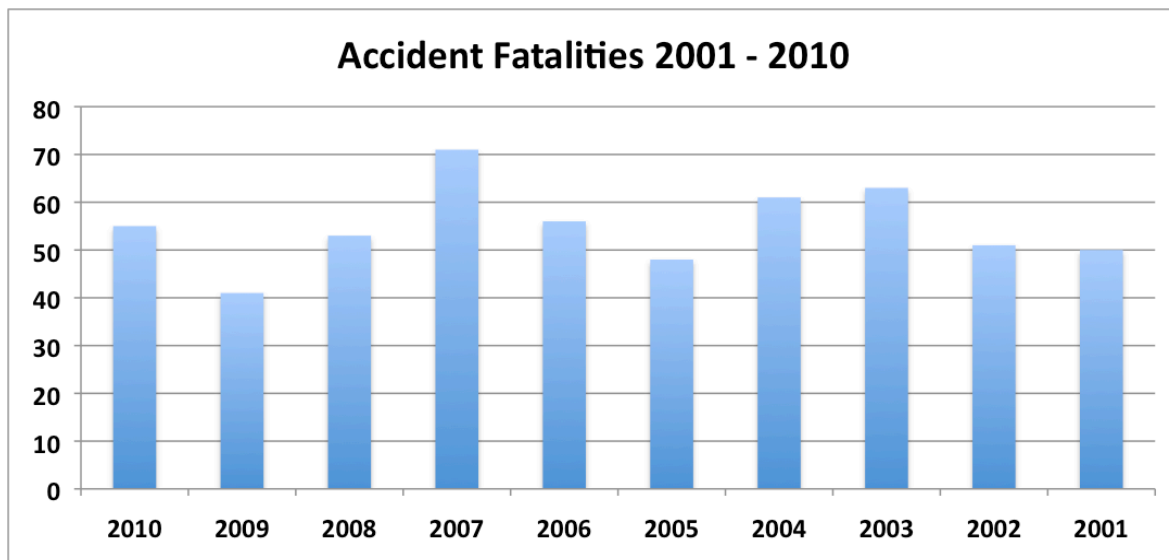


Figure 1. Accident Fatalities 2001 – 2010 (The International Association of Chiefs of Police, 1995)

While vehicle pursuits are always a hot topic in the media, research clearly shows that most injury accidents occurred while on routine patrol. Municipal agencies across the country reported that normal patrol accounts for 67.5% of injury producing

accidents, 21.3% occurred during emergency responses, and 11.2% were as a result of pursuits. The same study showed that municipal agencies reported that 62.66% of their accidents happened in urban settings, 29.94% happened in suburban areas, and 7.4% happened in rural areas (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 1995).

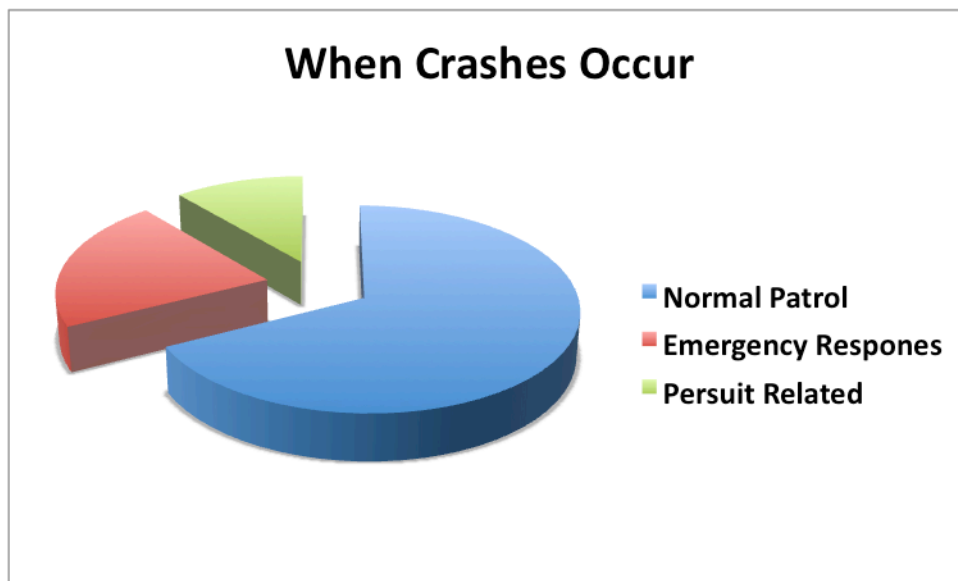


Figure 2. When crashes occur in municipal agencies. Law Enforcement Fleet Crash Study (The International Association of Chiefs of Police, 1995)

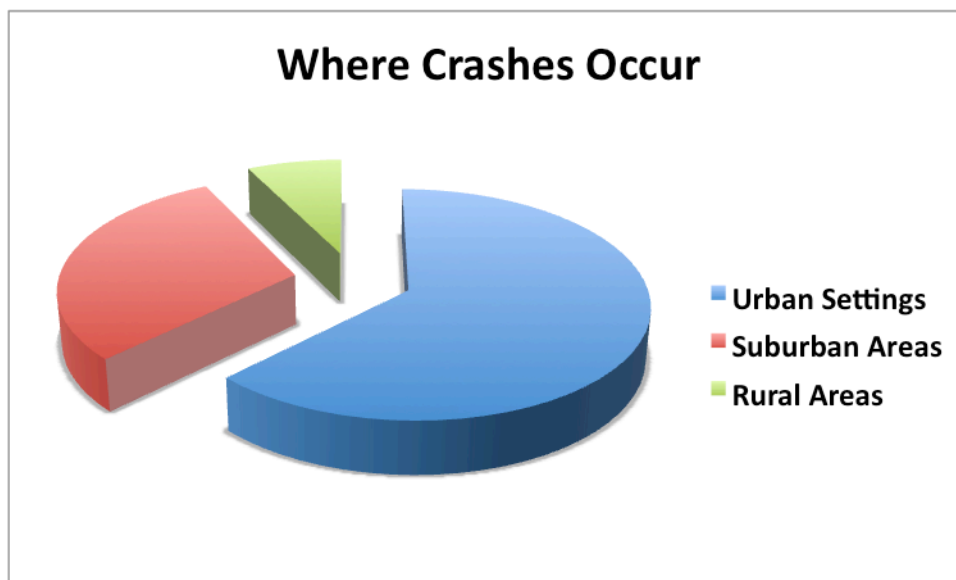


Figure 3. Where crashes occur in municipal agencies. Law Enforcement Fleet Crash Study (The International Association of Chiefs of Police, 1995)

One type of training reviewed is “Low Speed High Stress.” This type of training involves operating the standard police vehicle at speeds that are generally less than 40 miles per hour. The drivers are placed in driving situations that force them to react quickly in turning, backing, and maneuvering situations. This training has been used for many years by departments nationwide. It can be done in a relatively small area, such as a school or retail parking lot, with the vehicles the officers drive in their everyday assignment; this not only builds the officers confidence in his driving ability, but also in his equipment. Low speed, high stress training allows the instructor to vary the stress and difficulty level by adding tasks, such as using the radio or operating the emergency lights and sirens. Another benefit of the low speed, high stress training is that there is very little wear on the vehicles used in the training. This training also requires very little additional equipment other than the vehicle; it can be done with just traffic cones or lane markers and can be set up relatively quickly and easily.

Another method of training is the driving simulator; this type of training is not available to all departments because of the cost involved. California set up 11 regional driver training sites, complete with driving simulator, to teach enhanced decision-making skills (Douglas, 2002). Defensive driving is common type of classroom driver training. Classroom instruction can reinforce how outside influences can affect the driver. These influences include traffic, weather, road conditions, or pedestrians.

High speed pursuit driving is another form of driver training. This training offers the officers real hands on high speed driving experiences. Officers learn the handling characteristics of the vehicle at moderate to high speeds including passing, turning and breaking. One of the disadvantages of this training is that it can only be conducted on a

closed track set up for police pursuit training. This training is expensive and usually done by large agencies or regional-type police academies. Also, because of the dynamics of high speed pursuit driving, the wear on the patrol cars can be cost prohibitive. While some schools and academies use their own vehicles, this training tends to be very expensive and does not allow the officer to become familiar with the capabilities of their own equipment

METHODOLOGY

The research question examined whether or not fleet vehicle accidents can be reduced through driver training. The researcher hypothesizes that driver training can be a cost-effective method of reducing fleet vehicle accidents, reducing departmental liability as well as reducing officer injuries. The method of inquiry will include a review of articles, police and trade journals, and studies conducted by government agencies, such as the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The researcher will also review the training offered by different academies and colleges statewide, and a survey will be completed by agencies across the state, ranging in size from less than 10 officers to major metropolitan police agencies that employ over 1,000 officers. The instrument that will be used to measure the researcher's finding regarding the subject of reducing fleet vehicle accidents through training will include a questionnaire about types of training available, department mandates, and benefits of driver training.

FINDINGS

Officers from 25 agencies across the state were surveyed about their agencies driver training. The agencies ranged in size from only a few officers to departments with well over a thousand officers. Eleven of the department surveyed had between 1-50

officers, six of the departments had between 51-100 officers, three of the departments had 101-150 officers, and six had more than 150 officers. The Dallas Police Department was the largest, with over 3,000 officers. The research showed that 10 of the 25 departments mandate driver training. The research also showed that of the departments that mandate driver training, five have over 150 officers, two have between 101-150 officers, two have 51-100 officers, and one has less than 50 officers. A review of the different types of training used by the departments surveyed showed that the most common type of training available is pursuit driving, with 14 of the 25 only using this type of training. Of the participating departments, 12 offer other types of driver training. These include standard emergency vehicle operations, defensive driving, and also low speed/high stress driving and unspecified in-house training. Of the ten departments that mandate driver training, eight do so for new officers or for those officers involved in duty related fleet vehicle accidents. Only one of the departments mandates regular training for all officers. Nine of the officers who participated in the survey believed that driver training had reduced the number of accidents in their departments, while two said it had not. Fourteen of those surveyed said they did not know if training had reduced the number of accidents. When asked if they believed if this type of training would benefit their departments, 24 of the 25 said it would be beneficial.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine if the number of fleet vehicle accidents could be reduced through driver training. The researcher hypothesized that a comprehensive driver training program could reduce the number of accidents involving

law enforcement officers. The research showed that there is very little driver training available compared to other types of police training. However, the research also showed that there were some limitations in the study. It would have been helpful to survey members of the departments who were directly involved in training and fleet vehicle operations.

It seems that driver training has not been a priority to many agencies. Officers receive mandated training on firearms, cultural diversity, family violence, and other topics; however, it is not uncommon for a police officer to never have additional driver training other than the initial training they receive in the police academy. Driving is a learned and perishable skill, and officers must train on regular bases to maintain that skill.

Another important factor in the reduction of accidents is the cost of vehicle repair and replacement cost. These types of expenses can quickly deplete a department's budget. Police agencies reported that 70.78% of accidents resulted in property damage (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 1995). Lost man-hours due to accidents are an additional cost, and an experienced officer cannot be replaced overnight. The training of a new officer to fill that position can take years. Light duty assignments can also be costly. Although these officers are usually not lost permanently, the loss of service to the community costs money and presents a new risk that many forget. All officers' safety is jeopardized when patrol officers are on light duty and back up officers are not readily available. The effect of light duty assignments on manpower is hard to determine because most departments do not keep records of this type.

One of the most aggressive driver training programs was started by the Macon Police Department (MPD) in Georgia. During an eight-year period, the MPD spent seven million dollars as a result of traffic accidents involving police officers. This considerable expense came about through costs associated with litigation, liability, and proven negligence or recklessness in the operation of police vehicles. In addition to the extreme expense, though, was the lost officer time due to injuries and considerable negative publicity. The program did not come cheaply; the initial cost of the driving range facility alone was \$154,000. However, when this cost was added to the expense of training instructors and equipment, it was still less than had been spent recently on accidents. The department's current driver training is broken down into two basic units: Unit one consists of four hours of classroom work, where officers are given practical information on subjects, including principles of high speed operations, techniques for making high speed turns, braking techniques, counter steering, and skid control. Unit two of the course consists of 28 hours of hands-on training, with the majority of time spent behind the wheel on the three tracks at the training facility (Goodroe, 1988).

Each of the three separate tracks presents a different challenge and learning experience. Course one is the Skid Pan. It is black asphalt paved circle that has a 150-foot diameter. Sprinklers placed along the edge of the track duplicate conditions on a rain-soaked road on a moment's notice. Lubricants are added to the surface of the course to ensure a high-skid potential exists. This allows teaching of skid management techniques, such as throttle control and counter steering. The second course is dedicated to highway response training; it is the largest of the three tracks. It is laid out in a modified figure eight pattern to allow officers to experience a variety of turns and

straightaway conditions. Students face downhill and uphill grades, turning, lane changes, and a serpentine obstacle course. Officers learn proper cornering and braking techniques under simulated field conditions and in all types of weather. Course three teaches officers how to effectively handle their vehicles in close quarters. The paved roadway incorporates common patrol driving situations such as parallel parking, “U” turns, lane changes, serpentine movements, circle turns, backing maneuvers, and an alleyway. With such obstacles, this track teaches skills required in everyday patrol operations. To make the course as challenging as possible, there is a strict 25 miles per hour speed limit, and students are required to use turn signals where required and obey all traffic laws (Goodroe, 1988).

Stress is an important factor in police work, so officers must complete the courses in specific time limits, and receive and respond to radio calls while negotiating the obstacles. Training is also conducted in all types of weather. There is also stress from siren installed in the training car next to the driver’s seat. Officers also experience stress because they know if they fail the course, they will lose their driving privileges until they are retrained and pass the course. The measure of any program is the results it produces. According to MPD, in the first year after the program was fully operational, there was a 30% decrease in expenditures for accidents. In addition, officers had 95% fewer skidding and braking accidents after training (Goodroe, 1988).

There is no doubt that a well thought out comprehensive driver training program can reduce fleet vehicle accidents. Officers need regular driver training, and departments need to vary the types of training offered. Administrators need to realize how important the training is. Effective driver training will reduce the number of officers

and civilians injured and killed in vehicle accidents. It will decrease the lost time incurred by departments whose officers are on light duty or off-duty as a result of accidents. Also, fewer accidents mean fewer lawsuits, less vehicle repair, and replacement cost. It cannot be denied that driver training is a necessity in today's law enforcement community.

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APPENDIX**DRIVER TRAINING SURVEY**

1. Does your agency send officers to pursuit driver training?

YES

NO

2. Does your agency send officers to other types of driver training?

YES

NO

If your department does, please list the types of training on the back.

3. If driver training is available is it mandated by department policy?

YES

NO

4. If driver training is offered, has it reduced the number of accidents?

YES

NO

UNKNOWN

5. Do you believe this type of training would benefit your agency?

YES

NO

6. How many sworn officers at your agency?

a. 1-50

b. 51-100

c. 101-150

d. 150+

Name_____

Agency_____