

## 6. ACCIDENT PROCEDURES

An accident is one of the worst things that can happen to any driver, but particularly to a transit driver who is responsible for the well-being of passengers. In addition to caring for their passengers and trying to protect their vehicle from additional damage, drivers must avoid saying or doing anything that might result in increased liability to their system.

This section of the program addresses ways to deal with accidents, separating the process into two steps:

1. Evaluating and responding to the accident
2. Post-accident activities

While this section addresses accidents involving two or more vehicles, the procedures apply to any other type of accident as well.

### 1. Evaluating and Responding to the Accident

The first thing to do after an accident is to **find out if any passengers (including those in other vehicles) have been injured**. Secure the vehicle immediately to protect the passengers.

- *Stay calm.*
- *Turn to the passengers and ask if everyone is all right.*
- *Look up and down the vehicle to see if there are any unconscious or seriously injured passengers -- look for bleeding, broken limbs, vomiting, poor breathing. (First Aid should be administered only if you are certified to do so and your system policy permits it.)*
- *Look for other signs, such as disorientation, confusion, or inability to respond to your questions. These could indicate shock or a serious head injury.*

- Leave your vehicle and check others for injuries after you have determined that there are no serious injuries on your vehicle.
- Contact your dispatcher, giving information on the following:
  - exact location of the vehicle
  - if there are injuries
  - if police, fire, or ambulance are required
  - number of passengers on board
  - number of vehicles involved
  - other information required by your system policy
- Do not move the vehicle unless instructed to do so by police or your system management.

As soon as possible, look for additional hazards:

- If you see evidence of leaking fuel, turn off the engine, evacuate the vehicle immediately and urge other people in the area to get away. **Tell people not to smoke and do not use flares!**
- Determine if the vehicle is positioned in such a way that it is likely to be hit by oncoming traffic. If so, you will need to decide whether to evacuate the vehicle immediately.
- If evacuation is necessary, find a secure place for your passengers.

## 2. Post-accident Activities

Once you have responded to the accident by following the procedures described above, it will be necessary to obtain information and perform other actions to protect your passengers and your system. **The most important of these activities is to document what happened.**

- Obtain names, addresses, and phone numbers of passengers on your vehicle; many systems have "courtesy cards" for this purpose. Get an accurate count of your passengers.
- Get the vehicle license plate numbers first, then obtain names of drivers and passengers in other vehicles.
- Get the names and numbers of any witnesses to the accident.
- Record any other details that might be needed for a later investigation or court case.
- Get the name of the investigating police officer and his or her agency (county, city, etc.).
- If an ambulance was called, write down which hospital it went to.
- Note the time and specific location of the accident.

**Do not talk to anyone about the accident except for the appropriate authorities.**

- Do not blame others or take blame for the accident.
- Avoid discussing details with anyone except system officials, your insurance representatives, and/or police.
- Answer questions asked by officials, but don't volunteer any other information.
- Don't make any statements to the press or to bystanders.
- Do not be photographed with your vehicle in an accident situation.
- If contacted by an attorney or any other official about the accident, refer him or her back to the proper system official.

**Keep an eye out for details:**

- Are there any liquor, or beer bottles, or signs of drugs in the other vehicle(s)?
- Are any of the people involved acting strangely?
- Do you notice anything unusual about the scene or the vehicles involved?

As soon as possible, start taking notes. Describe what happened, and document all the information listed above. Add anything that might remotely be related to the accident.

**POINTS FOR REVIEW**

- The first step in responding to an accident is to evaluate the situation - in particular, have there been any injuries?
- Respond to the situation based on your evaluation.
- The primary consideration is helping any injured people.
- Notify dispatch as soon as reasonably possible.
- Document. Obtain as much information as you can about the passengers, other drivers and their passengers.
- Do not talk to anyone about the accident except police and system representatives.
- Do not blame others or take blame yourself.

## Securing the Vehicle

Follow the procedures described in Section 4, Securing the Vehicle.

1. Park in a safe location, clear of other traffic, allowing space for passengers to get off the vehicle safely. Leave extra room if the vehicle has any passengers who may require use of the lift.
2. Immediately turn on the four-way flashers.
3. Set parking brake.
4. Notify the dispatcher.
5. Be prepared to tell the mechanic in detail what happened to the vehicle.

## Protecting Passengers

Once the vehicle has been secured, the next decision is **how best to protect the passengers**. The driver will want to **keep the passengers informed**. They will usually want to know:

- *The nature of the delay*
- *How long the delay is expected to last*
- *What is being done to correct the problem*

Efforts should be made to ensure that amputees, diabetics, and other individuals with disabilities do not become overheated.

Unless the delay is expected to be short, the driver usually will contact the dispatcher to help passengers make other travel arrangements. In this instance the driver also will ask the dispatcher to contact the passengers' destination locations to give information on the reason for their delay.

The driver should assist the passengers in continuing on to their destinations. Generally, the dispatcher will send another vehicle, if one is available, to pick up the passengers. System policy should be followed when deciding how to assist passengers in completing their trips.

The driver's responsibility remains with those passengers who stay in or around the vehicle. As always, the primary concern is **safety**. For example, is it safer to have the passengers remain on the vehicle or to get out? The driver's decision will usually depend on:

- *Traffic*
- *Weather conditions*
- *Comfort of surrounding area*

Unless the vehicle is in a place where it may be hit by another vehicle or there is a danger of fire or other emergency, it is usually **safest and most efficient to have the passengers remain on the vehicle**. Staying on the vehicle generally will be more comfortable for the passengers since the temperature can be controlled if the engine is working. Also, the passengers' movements are more easily controlled on board. The driver doesn't have to worry about passengers wandering into the roadway or encountering another dangerous situation.

Passengers will usually wait on the vehicle until another comes to pick them up. When transferring the passengers to the second vehicle, the driver should follow these procedures to help protect their safety:

- *Ensure there is a clear path between the vehicles.*
- *Announce to the passengers that they are to change vehicles and give them specific directions.*
- *Stand at the door of the vehicle, directing the passengers and apologizing for the delay. (Some passengers may need to be escorted by the driver.)*
- *If it is dark outside, light the path with a flashlight, if one is available. Another method is to park so that one of the vehicles' headlights will light the way.*

### Identifying Problems

Drivers usually are not expected to make any repairs on their vehicles; in fact, some systems prohibit the drivers from doing so. However, an awareness of typical problems can help you make a more informed, reliable call to the dispatch, thus helping the dispatcher and mechanic determine the kind of assistance that is most appropriate.

Drivers can monitor their vehicles' performance in three ways by:

- *Checking gauges frequently*
- *Maintaining an understanding of how well the vehicle is functioning*
- *Making use of the senses of hearing, sight, and smell*

By notifying the dispatch or the mechanic of any unusual change in gauge reading or vehicle operation, the driver can help prevent breakdowns or expensive repairs later and reduce troubleshooting and repair time.

When the vehicle does break down or show a change in performance, the problem usually falls into one of four categories:

- *Electrical*
- *Heating/cooling*
- *Running gear (wheels, axles, etc.)*
- *Engine or transmission*

### Indicators of Electrical Problems

The electrical system provides the sparks to keep the engine running as well as operating such accessories as the lights and fans. Signs of a problem in the electrical system include:

- *Light surge or fade (lights increase in brightness as you accelerate)*
- *Lights and signals do not come on at all*
- *Engine doesn't turn over when you try to start the engine*
- *Engine suddenly dies*
- *Momentary loss of lights*

The following are possible causes of these electrical problems:

- ***Surging or fading lights***
  - *Alternator belt slipping*
  - *Over-charging alternator*
  - *Corroded electrical connections*
  - *Loose connections*
  - *Alternator failure*
  - *Battery failure*
  - *Regulator failure*

- **No lights or signals**
  - Fuse/circuit breaker failure
  - Alternator failure
  - Battery failure
  - Slipping belts
  
- **Low or no starting power**
  - Battery failure
  - Alternator failure
  - Slipping or loose belts
  - Bad electrical connections
  - Charge system failure
  
- **Engine dies**
  - Battery failure
  - Alternator belts broken
  - Alternator failure

### Indicators of Engine Heating and Cooling System Problems

The heating and cooling system keeps the engine at the proper operating temperature. Failure of this system can result in the destruction of the engine. There are four signs of failure in this system:

- The vehicle does not heat or cool properly
- Fans do not work
- Gauges, lights, or buzzer warn of problems
- Vehicle is leaking water or coolant

### Indicators of Problems in the Running Gear

"Running gear" refers to the tires, bearings, axles, and brakes. These are some of the indicators of problems in the running gear, including their related possible causes:

- **Rough ride**
  - Flat tire
  - Alignment problems
  - Tire/wheel out of round
  - Possible steering or suspension problems
  
- **Poor braking performance**
  - Air/hydraulic line leak
  - Frozen brake line
  - Lining/pad wear
  - Drum or disk problems
  - Heating from overuse
  - Wet drums or pads
  
- **Clanking sounds and steering problems**
  - Alignment out
  - Radius rods worn out
  - Steering arms loose or disconnected
  - Front brakes unequal
  - Suspension problems

### Indicators of Engine Problems

Finally, there are the problems that can develop in the engine itself. Sometimes the problem can be caused by the following:

- **Overheating**
  - Low coolant level
  - Fan/coolant system problems (belts or electrical)
  - Engine not functioning properly
  - Heavy loads
  
- **Rough running and/or heavy smoke**
  - Engine out of tune
  - Defective fuel pump

- *Bad fuel injectors or carburetion*
- *Ignition and spark problems*
  
- *Engine dies*
  - *Overheating*
  - *Low oil pressure*
  - *Out of fuel, or fuel delivery system not working*
  - *Injectors fouled/carburetion problems*

### Requesting Assistance

By now, you have taken care of your passengers and tried to identify the problem in your vehicle. The next step is **reporting the problem** by radio, if your vehicle is equipped with one, or by phone.

#### By Radio

- *In as much detail as possible, be prepared to report the type of malfunction that occurred and the results of your problem identification effort.*
- *Identify everything that happened before the vehicle broke down.*
- *Tell the dispatcher or mechanic anything you tried to do to get the vehicle operating again.*

#### By Telephone

- *Tell the dispatcher or mechanic what led to the breakdown and what you did to try to identify the problem.*
- *Take down the instructions and follow them closely.*
- *In isolated locations, you may need to flag down another motorist and ask him or her to make the call for you. Make sure to write the information down for the motorist.*
- *If you are carrying disabled passengers, you have to assess their needs and ability to take care of*

themselves before leaving the vehicle for any reason.  
(Check your system policy as to how to handle situations that require leaving the vehicle.)

### While Waiting for Assistance

- Keep the passengers as comfortable as possible; inform them of any changes or developments.
- Transfer the passengers if and when another vehicle arrives.
- Stay with your vehicle at all times - - even if all the passengers have left -- unless you are instructed to leave by police or your system management.

### POINTS FOR REVIEW

- The first thing to do when the vehicle breaks down is to park in a safe location and secure the vehicle.
- Notify the dispatch as soon as possible, informing it as much as you can as to the nature of the problem.
- Keep the passengers as comfortable as possible; always tell them the reason for the delay and what is being done to correct the problem.
- Keep the passengers on the vehicle unless they are to be transferred to another vehicle or they might be in danger if they remain.