

POLICE VEHICLES: PURCHASE OPTIONS AND DEPLOYMENT

The office of the Safety Director at J.A. Montgomery Consulting assists police agencies, risk control consultants, and elected officials with the challenges of operating a law enforcement agency in New Jersey. NJ State laws, NJ Attorney General Directives, court decisions, rules, and policies all affect the day-to-day operations of our law enforcement clients.

One of the primary tools used by uniformed police personnel is motor vehicles. Patrol and traffic enforcement officers will spend the majority of their shift on patrol, responding to calls for service, and engaging in traffic enforcement activities. Motor vehicle accidents lay claim to a large majority of our officer's worker's compensation and property claims. Making good decisions on identifying the types of vehicles needed for patrol and traffic operations is critical to the safety of the officer and the public. Our goal is to manage the risk that officers face by minimizing injuries and loss of life.

Training

The New Jersey Attorney General issued guidelines on vehicle pursuits and they can be accessed [here](#). There are specific situations whereby officers may engage in a pursuit to apprehend a suspect. This guideline, along with realistic training and strong policy guidance, is key to helping officers with the process of making good decisions when confronted with the question of when and under what conditions officers may pursue a suspect as well as how they respond to emergency calls for service.

Making Decisions:

Along with training, research needs to be conducted to ensure that good decisions are being made when purchasing police vehicles that will provide protection, service the officer, and withstand the intense rigors of high-speed driving, cornering, and braking.

Every municipality needs to look at this from a "Risk Management" perspective! Going through a process to ensure that you have the right vehicles purchased for a specific mission is critical. Vehicles that will be used for traffic enforcement purposes and are expected to be driven at higher speeds need to be pursuit-rated. Other vehicles that may be used for surveillance or that need to fulfill a specific mission might not need to be pursuit-rated. The operators of these vehicles need to understand and be aware of the capabilities and limitations of these special vehicles.

Purchasing and deploying special-use trailers also requires careful consideration with respect to the trailer design, size, and type. Vehicles that are assigned to tow these trailers need to be rated and have the proper equipment installed to ensure that they can be towed safely. Additionally, adding trailers to a fleet requires specific hands-on training to ensure operators can navigate the variety of challenges that towing a trailer can pose.

Scanning and Analyzing:

Members of the governing body, agency leaders, and trainers should be involved in the process of choosing a vehicle that meets the mission needs of the agency. An assessment should be undertaken to determine which vehicle will work best for the agency. Determine how the vehicle will be used. Patrol operations, traffic enforcement, pursuits, crime prevention, emergency vehicles for natural disasters, administration, and prisoner transportation are some of the considerations that should be identified.

Gather information from other agencies and agency personnel on vehicle performance, repairs, comfort, and reliability.

Several resources can be accessed on the internet to assist with deciding which vehicle would fulfill the agency's mission:

- FEMA's Emergency Vehicle Safety Initiative can be found [here](#).
- Michigan State Police Annual Police Vehicle Evaluation can be found [here](#).
- Dodge Police Vehicle information can be found [here](#).
- GM Police Vehicle information can be found [here](#).
- Ford Police Vehicle information can be found [here](#).

Nationwide standards for pursuit-rated vehicles do not exist, but vehicle manufacturers have identified specific equipment that offers advanced safety features. They include vehicles that are designed for high-speed emergency vehicle operations, engine designs, enhanced braking systems, enhanced suspension systems, steel safety frames, and electrical systems designed to meet the needs of the vehicle's emergency equipment (lights, computers, sirens, etc.). Before making modifications or installing equipment on pursuit-rated vehicles, careful consideration should be given to ensure that any modifications will not alter a pursuit-rated vehicle's capability. For instance, the installation of larger wheels on pursuit-rated vehicles or adding a large truck cap to a pursuit-rated pickup may alter the pursuit capability and pose a danger to the driver and others.

Purchasing and Deployment:

Once the assessment has been completed and a determination has been made as to which vehicle model will best meet the needs of the agency, plans to move forward with the procurement of the equipment can be made. In many instances, municipalities have taken advantage of using "State Contract" purchasing. An alternative to this process that may reduce costs is to "Bid" the vehicles out by developing a specification and a bid process. It is not uncommon to find that this process can save money and the savings could be used to defray the cost of the vehicle's emergency equipment.

The decision of what types of emergency equipment to purchase can be daunting. Current offerings include but are not limited to a large variety of lights and directional signals, radios, Wi-Fi modems, computer mounts, ballistic materials for doors and windows, passenger protection systems, officer safety alert systems, camera systems, etc. Each agency should assess the use of the new vehicle and gain feedback from officers to determine what emergency equipment and safety features are most appropriate for the agency.

Many vehicle manufacturers offer options such as Bluetooth connectivity which can promote the use of hands-free technology. Agencies may wish to consider this when making purchases while also making certain that the use of any non-manufactured devices in the vehicle is governed by policy and training.

When the vehicles are delivered, they should be inspected to ensure that the right model numbers and upgrades that were requested in the specifications are on the vehicle. Records should be maintained for repairs and general maintenance.

Purchasing of police vehicles comes under the jurisdiction of the governing body. The governing body may promulgate rules as it relates to the vehicles being used during off-duty hours, side work, and any labor contracts that were agreed upon by the governing body. Deployment and the assignment of vehicles on a day-to-day basis while on-duty comes under the authority of the Chief of Police (40A:14-118).

Vehicle Decommissioning:

Every vehicle will eventually reach the end of its service life, and the municipality needs to ensure that proper decommissioning occurs. The removal of "Police" markings needs to be completed before the vehicle is decommissioned and disposed of by the municipality. All radios, emergency lights, and sirens should be removed.

There have been incidents where persons have purchased or obtained decommissioned police units and used them for illegal purposes.

Following this decision-making process will help municipalities with the process of purchasing the right vehicle to help the agency fulfill its mission, mitigate risks, and keep our officers safe.

Additional Resource Considerations:

[Law Enforcement Message - After Market Police Vehicle Theft Prevention Devices](#)

[Sample Policy Template – Police Vehicle Usage \(Includes Cell Phones\)](#)

If you have any questions, please contact your Law Enforcement Risk Control Consultant.