

Manual Traffic Control and Direction

Introduction:

There are many reasons you may be called on to manually control (direct) traffic (collisions, hazardous material spills, fire department assists, road hazards, downed power-lines, crime scenes, lack of traffic control devices, special event). The purpose of manual traffic control is to maintain the flow of traffic, while preserving safety.

Manual control can be extremely dangerous. To enhance safety:

- Know your escape routes before going out into traffic
- Don not do manual control in an area that does not have an escape route
- Maintain constant 360 degree view
- Do not become complacent
- Watch vehicles until they come to a complete stop
 - Do not turn your back on an oncoming vehicle
- Never assume that you know what a driver is going to do

Equipment/Use:

- Whistle
 - With hand signals: one long blast for stop, two short blasts for go
 - Several short blasts to gain attention when a driver is not responding to a signal
- White or orange gloves
- Illuminated baton (night/inclement weather - turn it off when not in use and be cognizant of blinding on-coming traffic)
- Patrol car emergency lights, overheads, wig-wags, and directional bar
- High visibility reflectorized vests or clothing
- Flares
 - Made of phosphorous compound which burns at high temp. The smoke is toxic and they can not be extinguished with water.
 - Last less than marked (15-minute last about 12 minutes, 30-minute ~ 24 minutes). Cross flares at the end to extend time
 - Operation:
 - Light flares away from body/turn head
 - Lay (don't throw) on ground with flame toward traffic
 - Place cap with tab on the end of the flare to prevent it from rolling
 - Extinguish by rubbing the flame on pavement or tapping on a curb
 - Remove from roadway when finished, making sure the flame is out before discarding
 - Cautions:
 - Don't use near gas, fumes or dry grass
 - NEVER step on a flare to put it out – it will burn thru shoes
 - Patterns and Placements
 - Establish a 50-foot buffer zone
 - Extend away from buffer zone - rule of thumb: posted speed limit x2 = number of strides at which the last flare is placed (example 55 mph zone would have flares out 110 strides from the buffer zone)

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- 15-10 feet apart in poor weather, 25-35 feet apart in good weather
 - First few in a straight line, gradually tapering as you want the traffic to go
- Reflectorized cones – similar placement but space the speed limit apart

Mechanics of Traffic Control

Stand with your weight evenly distributed, feet about shoulder width apart and flat on the ground. Maintain a professional and authoritative posture. Movements must be crisp and signals should be decisive and uniform. Let your hands hang down at your sides when you are not signaling.

Keep your sides toward the moving traffic, with the back and front of your body toward the stopped traffic.

Always take a position of high visibility. Stand where traffic can see you – usually in the center of the intersection.

Signaling:

STOP: With your arm fully extended, point at the driver you want to stop until you have made eye contact. Raise your hand so that the palm is flat to the driver and hold this position until the vehicle comes to a stop.

When stopping traffic in two directions, proceed as above; keep your arm and hand in this position toward the stopped vehicle; use your other hand similarly to stop traffic moving in the remaining direction. Keep BOTH arms extended until both directions are fully stopped.

GO: Reposition your body so your side will face the traffic you want to move. With your arm fully extended, point at the driver you want to move until you have made eye contact. Bending your arm only at the elbow, wave your hand from the driver toward your chin.

When starting traffic in two directions, proceed as above; when traffic is moving, drop your arm, then start traffic from the opposite side in the same manner.

RIGHT TURNS: Not usually required as vehicles will turn naturally on approach; if needed, point toward the driver with your extended arm; make sure the driver sees your direction; swing your arm to point in the direction the vehicle should turn. Continue to point in the desired direction until the vehicle begins the turn.

LEFT TURNS: Make sure traffic is completely stopped in the lanes through which the vehicles must cross. While holding the stop signal on this traffic, make the turning swing with your other arm, pointing in the direction the traffic should continue.

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Rules for a smooth operation:

- Stop traffic in natural gaps
- Watch traffic lights downstream so traffic does not back up past where you are
- Larger vehicles have trouble starting and stopping, so try to keep them moving even though you may have to wait for them
- Watch for drunk drivers/elderly drivers
 - Slower to react
 - Easy to spot in a line-up of vehicles
 - Don't let a DUI go because you think it would increase problems – call for another unit to process
- If an accident occurs where you are directing traffic:
 - Advise communications
 - If hit and run, give a description of the running vehicle
 - Activate EMS - advise the nature of the injuries
 - Secure the scene
 - Render aid
- Working in teams: Set up at opposite ends of the scene and use your portable radios to communicate with each other
- Approaching emergency vehicles with their lights activated have the right of way; stop all traffic and signal emergency traffic through
- Curious Drivers/Pedestrians often will show more interest in the police activity than in the officer directing the traffic
 - Drivers will stop and observe the activities
 - Drivers stop to ask questions
- Be an active traffic controller and keep traffic moving at a steady pace

Scene Considerations:

Working with the Fire Department at scenes:

- Protect the scene and any evidence – coordinate with fire personnel to collect/mark evidence before event scenes are washed down
- Do not allow vehicles to drive over fire hoses
- Do not use flares with liquid material spills
- Stay upwind 2000 feet from any hazardous material spills
- Do not allow traffic to drive over downed power lines
 - Be aware of where downed wires are touching
 - Keep occupants in cars where wires are down – the roadway will be energized 40-60 feet out from the vehicle