

BALDWIN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
SOP #2
PURSUIT DRIVING

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this SOP is to provide guidelines and delineate responsibilities governing pursuit of motor vehicles.

II. SCOPE

This SOP shall apply to all sworn Sheriff's Office personnel.

III. DISCUSSION

The primary obligation and responsibility of law enforcement officers is the protection of human life. Motor vehicle pursuits are synonymous with hazard. It is not the intent of this directive to prohibit all motor vehicle pursuits; however, it is the intent to restrict motor vehicle pursuits to those situations and circumstances in which the immediate apprehension of the violator outweighs the hazards generated to deputies, the public or the occupant(s) of the vehicle being pursued.

The immediate apprehension of a violator is never more important than the safety of innocent motorists or the deputy, himself. When it becomes apparent that the immediacy of apprehension is outweighed by a clear and unreasonable danger to the deputy and others, the pursuit should be abandoned.

The decision to pursue is not irreversible. Those involved with the pursuit must continually question whether the seriousness of the crime justifies continuing the pursuit. When there is a clear and unreasonable danger to the deputy and other users of the highway, the pursuit should be discontinued.

High speed pursuit is one of the most dangerous activities that can be engaged in by a law enforcement officer. The police vehicle is a potentially deadly weapon and pursuit driving is often a life or death situation. Except for the use of firearms, high-speed pursuits and their results create more controversy than any other respect of police patrol activities.

A. WHEN TO PURSUE:

1. Officers will engage in only those pursuits which are hazardous and which present a continuing danger to other road users, i.e., DUI, reckless driving, excessive speeding, etc.
2. Unmarked police vehicles should not engage in pursuit driving for the purpose of apprehending a traffic or misdemeanor violator.
3. *High speed pursuits will be used only as a last resort. If safer alternatives are present they should be taken. An example of an alternative is signing a warrant and effecting an arrest at a later date when the violator is known.*

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4. Officers should never engage in high speed pursuits when it appears that apprehension by other means is likely and there is no immediate and present danger to others.

B. DURING THE PURSUIT:

1. All officers involved will immediately go to a common frequency (county primary, if possible) and make all transmissions in plain English and activate all emergency lights and siren, notify the dispatcher and provide the following information:
 - a. The specific location
 - b. Direction of travel
 - c. Driving speed
 - d. Reason for pursuit, i.e. driving violation, possible felon, stolen car, etc.
2. An identification of the driver, passengers and vehicle should be given to the Communications Officer as soon as possible.
3. An officer, when in a high speed pursuit, will maximize control over his vehicle by adjusting his speed according to traffic, vehicles and road and weather conditions.
4. An officer should consider the use of tire deflating spikes as a means of terminating a pursuit.
5. An officer will not fire from or at a moving vehicle during pursuit unless it is to defend himself or another party from an attack which he has positive cause to believe could result in a death or serious bodily injury. This type action is considered as use of deadly force.
6. An officer should not bump or ram any fleeing vehicle or block its path in an attempt to stop it unless a major felony (murder, rape, etc.) has been committed and the use of deadly force is justified under the guidelines of Baldwin County Sheriff's Office SOP #1, Section 1.
7. Road blocks will not be used unless the person fleeing is wanted for or has just committed a violent felony and who constitutes a serious hazard to the public if not apprehended.
8. Shift supervisors will assume command of, and monitor, the pursuit and use their discretion in continuing or terminating it as well as when, or if, to initiate road spike deployment (see Tire Deflating Spike Section). If termination is ordered, the pursuing officer should comply immediately.

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C. THE PURSUIT SHOULD BE DISCONTINUED WHEN THE

FOLLOWING ARE PRESENT:

1. The hazards of a high speed pursuit are high, exposing the officer and the public to unwarranted risk, especially if the violation is not of a serious nature.
 2. Conditions such as darkness, road and weather hazards and the distance between the officer and the violator clearly indicate the futility of further pursuit.
 3. The offense is a misdemeanor and the identity of the violator is known.
 4. The pursuing officer knows or has reason to believe that the fleeing vehicle is operated by a juvenile who has committed a misdemeanor or a nonviolent felony and that the safety factors involved are greater than a juvenile can cope with.
 5. The pursuing officer has been directed to end the pursuit by a shift supervisor or other officer in authority.
 6. The safety of the general public is always to be given greater weight by the officer than the apprehension of the targeted suspect. At any time the officer feels that to continue the pursuit would jeopardize the health, safety and welfare of the general public, the pursuit shall be discontinued.
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