



San Diego County Sheriff

Training Bulletin

William D. Gore, Sheriff

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ASTREA Assistance with Vehicle Pursuits

A police vehicle pursuit exposes the public, deputies, and fleeing violators to the potential risk of death, serious injury, or damage to personal property. Deputies may be subject to administrative action for negligent emergency vehicle operation and the entity may be found liable in civil actions. If the emergency vehicle operation rises to the level of criminal negligence, deputies may be subject to criminal prosecution.

When engaged in a pursuit, deputies should weigh the seriousness of the violator's suspected crime against the potential for death or injury if the pursuit is continued. Frequently, discontinuance of a pursuit, in the interest of public safety, is most appropriate.

In a pursuit, the violator frequently refuses to give up and the officer feels an obligation to succeed in the pursuit. The psychological phenomenon can cloud one's judgment and may cause the officer to continue the pursuit beyond the point where common sense and good judgment would require the pursuit to be discontinued.

The "Rules of the Road" exemption does not relieve the driver from the duty to drive with due regard for the safety of all persons using the highway, nor does it protect him/her from the consequences of an arbitrary exercise of the privileges granted in that section. (21056 CVC)

When balancing the interests of public safety with effective law enforcement, each deputy and supervisor involved in a pursuit should carefully and continuously consider the following factors in determining whether or not to initiate, limit, discontinue, or otherwise control the pursuit.

Aircraft Assistance

Units involved in pursuits should request air support assistance. Aircraft can provide valuable information to ground units concerning upcoming traffic congestion, hazards, or other factors which might endanger the safety of the deputy(s) or the public.

Once the pursued vehicle is overtaken by a law enforcement aircraft, the aircraft becomes an assisting unit responsible for broadcasting ongoing radio updates on the route of travel.

Once the aircraft is in position, the supervisor, in the interest of safety, shall evaluate the tactical involvement of ground units in the pursuit. Consideration should be given to discontinuing the ground pursuit and having the aircraft conduct aerial surveillance of the suspect vehicle for later apprehension.

The quicker aerial support units are notified the more likely they can get overhead before the suspect decides to flee. The presence of a helicopter may even deter the suspect from considering the option to flee which is certainly in the best interest of public safety.

All pursuits are subject to review by the Critical Incident Review Board.