



**OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF POLICE
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SYSTEM
TRAINING BULLETIN 022**



**Officer Safety: Reaching into Vehicles
November 9, 2018**

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this training bulletin is to provide the University of Texas System Police (UTSP) personnel an overview of the dangers of reaching into a vehicle during a traffic stop.

This training bulletin coincides with ODOP/UTSP Policy 714 - Vehicle Pursuits, November 10, 2014.

II. INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement officers have been seriously hurt and/or killed by reaching into a vehicle with the intent to try and stop the driver of the vehicle from fleeing the scene.

Situations when an officer reaches into the interior of the vehicle typically occur once (a) the officer decides to take action because the driver refuses to comply with a request from the officer to turn off the vehicle, (b) the officer is preparing for an arrest and realizes the vehicle is still running or (c), after realizing that the driver is impaired and might be mentally unaware of their surrounding or situation.

As the officer reaches into the vehicle to turn off the ignition, the driver can simply trap or entangle the officer in an area surrounding the steering wheel. The driver then accelerates which results in the officer's injury. This type of event often occurs when the driver has committed a misdemeanor offense. Reaching into a vehicle during a traffic stop can have adverse consequences and should be avoided. Safer alternatives need to be considered before deciding if it is necessary to reach into a vehicle.

III. FUNDAMENTALS

Ideally, an officer should wait for the vehicle returns from dispatch or a Mobile Data Terminal before deciding on a strategy for approaching the vehicle. For example, after receiving "stolen vehicle" information, officers would transition their vehicle approach to the High Risk/Felony Vehicle Stop procedure.

Fundamental patrol tactics should be followed to increase officer safety. Officers should conduct the business of the traffic stop and citation process outside of the passenger compartment and avoid reaching into the vehicle. Drivers should present their driver's license and/or vehicle documentation to the officer through the window and outside of the vehicle to avoid the officer from reaching into the vehicle through the window. In the

event where the driver must sign a citation, the driver would again reach through the window and outside of the vehicle to comply with the officer's request.

Officers should be aware of traffic in the surrounding area while conducting a vehicle stop. If the driver decides to flee, an officer does not want to expose him/herself to dangerous traffic conditions. Officers are encouraged to avoid reaching into a vehicle.

IV. TACTICAL POINTS

- A. If the driver does not respond to verbal direction, he or she may be panicking, may be under the influence of alcohol and or drugs, or in some cases unknown to the officer, may have committed a crime or crimes and is willing to take risks to escape.
- B. It is problematic to attempt to take the keys out of the ignition through the outside window of a vehicle that is sitting still with a compliant driver. It becomes even more difficult when you are reaching across a hostile driver who is non-compliant and is considering fleeing in the vehicle.
- C. Newer vehicles can have ignition switches that resist a straight pull of the key, while others have keyless, push-button ignitions. With these vehicles, an officer becomes limited to either attempting to take control of the shifter or the steering wheel.
- D. Many drivers utilize their seatbelts. Officers will have difficulty with any vehicle extraction strategy when the seatbelt is utilized by the driver.
- E. Leaning into the driver's vehicle at a traffic stop makes an officer very vulnerable to attack. The officer's head is within close proximity to the subject and the officer's center of gravity is uncontrolled. This results in officers having their bodies extended out of the open windows as the violator accelerates the vehicle.
- F. Once the vehicle is in motion, officers have very limited options, none of which are good; leaving officers completely exposed and defenseless.
- G. When officers realize the driver is going to flee, it is recommended to disengage and create distance from the vehicle.
- H. Decide if you can pursue pursuant to state law and ODOP policy #714 "Vehicle Pursuits".
- I. Weigh risks versus need.
- J. Officers should already have established the identity of the driver from license plate and/or driver's license information. Contact can be made with the driver later under more safe and controlled conditions.

V. **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES/REFERENCE MATERIALS**

Institution police departments can refer to the following resources for additional information;

- 1) “Vehicles Dragging Officers”; Texas Police Chiefs Association, Weekly Brief #137; 2017
- 2) “Don't Reach for the Keys”; by William Harvey, Police Magazine; 2015
- 3) “Texas Basic Peace Officer Course”; Texas Commission on Law Enforcement; 2013
- 4) “Reality Training: Georgia Trooper Dragged”; by Dave Smith, PoliceOne.com; 2008



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