
Vehicle Use

703.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to establish a system of accountability to ensure department vehicles are used appropriately. This policy provides guidelines for on- and off-duty use of department vehicles and shall not be construed to create or imply any contractual obligation by the City of Mendota Heights to provide assigned take-home vehicles.

Additional guidelines for member responsibilities when transporting persons in custody may be found in the Transporting Persons in Custody Policy.

703.2 POLICY

The Mendota Heights Police Department provides vehicles for department-related business and may assign patrol and unmarked vehicles based on a determination of operational efficiency, economic impact to the Department, requirements for tactical deployments and other considerations.

703.3 USE OF VEHICLES

703.3.1 OTHER USE OF VEHICLES

Members utilizing a vehicle for any purpose other than their normally assigned duties or normal vehicle assignment (e.g., transportation to training, community event) shall first notify the Shift Sergeant.

This subsection does not apply to those who are assigned to transport vehicles to and from the maintenance yard or car wash.

703.3.2 INSPECTIONS

Members shall be responsible for inspecting the interior and exterior of any assigned vehicle before taking the vehicle into service and at the conclusion of their shifts. Any previously unreported damage, mechanical problems, unauthorized contents or other problems with the vehicle shall be promptly reported to a supervisor and documented as appropriate.

The interior of any vehicle that has been used to transport any person other than a member of this department should be inspected prior to placing another person in the vehicle and again after the person is removed. This is to ensure that unauthorized or personal items have not been left in the vehicle.

When transporting any suspect, prisoner or arrestee, the transporting member shall search all areas of the vehicle that are accessible by the person before and after that person is transported.

All department vehicles are subject to inspection and/or search at any time by a supervisor without notice and without cause. No member assigned to or operating such vehicle shall be entitled to any expectation of privacy with respect to the vehicle or its contents.

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703.3.3 SECURITY AND UNATTENDED VEHICLES

Unattended vehicles should be locked and secured at all times. No key should be left in the vehicle except when it is necessary that the vehicle be left running (e.g., continued activation of emergency lights, canine safety, equipment charging). Officers who exit a vehicle rapidly in an emergency situation or to engage in a foot pursuit must carefully balance the need to exit the vehicle quickly with the need to secure the vehicle.

Members shall ensure all weapons are secured while the vehicle is unattended.

703.3.4 MOBILE DIGITAL COMPUTER

Members assigned to vehicles equipped with a Mobile Digital Computer (MDC) shall log onto the MDC with the required information when utilizing the vehicle. Members will place themselves in the appropriate status according to their specific role (ie Busy/Unavailable, Detail, etc). Use of the MDC is governed by the Mobile Digital Computer Use Policy.

703.3.5 CELLULAR DEVICES

Mendota Heights Police Department patrol vehicles are equipped with “Bluetooth” capabilities.

Officers should ensure their department issued cellular phones are paired with their patrol vehicles at the beginning of their shift, allowing their use in a hands-free manner while driving.

Officers should only use cellular devices connected to their patrol vehicle through Bluetooth while driving, unless emergency circumstances exist. When possible, officers should pull off the roadway in a safe location if there is a need to use a cellular device.

703.3.6 VEHICLE LOCATION SYSTEM

Patrol and other vehicles, at the discretion of the Chief of Police, may be equipped with a system designed to track the vehicle's location. While the system may provide vehicle location and other information, members are not relieved of their responsibility to use required communication practices to report their location and status.

Members shall not make any unauthorized modifications to the system. Upon logging into MDC, members shall verify that the system is on and report any malfunctions to their supervisor. If the member finds that the system is not functioning properly at any time, they should notify a supervisor as soon as practicable.

System data may be accessed by supervisors at any time. However, access to historical data by personnel other than supervisors will require Sergeant approval.

All data captured by the system shall be retained in accordance with the established records retention schedule.

703.3.7 KEYS

Members approved to operate marked patrol vehicles should be issued a copy of the key as part of their initial equipment distribution. Members who are assigned a specific vehicle should be issued keys for that vehicle.

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Members shall not duplicate keys. The loss of a key shall be promptly reported in writing through the member's chain of command.

703.3.8 AUTHORIZED PASSENGERS

Members operating department vehicles shall not permit persons other than City personnel or persons required to be conveyed in the performance of duty, or as otherwise authorized, to ride as passengers in the vehicle, except as stated in the Ride-Along Policy.

703.3.9 ALCOHOL

Members who have consumed alcohol are prohibited from operating any marked department vehicle unless it is required by the duty assignment (e.g., task force, undercover work). Regardless of assignment, members may not violate state law regarding vehicle operation while intoxicated.

703.3.10 PARKING

Except when responding to an emergency or when urgent department-related business requires otherwise, members driving department vehicles should obey all parking regulations at all times.

Department vehicles should be parked in assigned stalls. Members shall not park privately owned vehicles in stalls assigned to department vehicles or in other areas of the parking lot that are not so designated unless authorized by a supervisor. Privately owned motorcycles shall be parked in designated areas.

703.3.11 ACCESSORIES AND/OR MODIFICATIONS

There shall be no modifications, additions or removal of any equipment or accessories without written permission from the Chief of Police or designee..

703.3.12 NON-SWORN MEMBER USE

Non-sworn members using marked emergency vehicles for patrol shall ensure that all weapons have been removed before going into service. Non-sworn members shall not operate the emergency lights or siren of any vehicle unless expressly authorized by a supervisor. An exception can be made for same day service at public works or for car washes. If a vehicle needs to be left overnight for service, the weapons should be removed.

703.4 INDIVIDUAL MEMBER ASSIGNMENT TO VEHICLES

Department vehicles may be assigned to individual members at the discretion of the Chief of Police. Vehicles may be assigned for on-duty and/or take-home use. Assigned vehicles may be changed at any time. Permission to take home a vehicle may be withdrawn at any time.

The assignment of vehicles may be suspended when the member is unable to perform his/her regular assignment.

703.4.1 ON-DUTY USE

Vehicle assignments shall be based on the nature of the member's duties, job description and essential functions, and employment or appointment status. Vehicles may be reassigned or

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utilized by other department members at the discretion of the Chief of Police or the authorized designee.

703.4.2 UNSCHEDULED TAKE-HOME USE

Circumstances may arise where department vehicles must be used by members to commute to and from a work assignment. Members may take home department vehicles only with prior approval of a supervisor and shall meet the following criteria:

- (a) The circumstances are unplanned and were created by the needs of the Department.
- (b) Other reasonable transportation options are not available.
- (c) The member lives within a reasonable distance (generally not to exceed a 60-minute drive time) of the Mendota Heights City limits.
- (d) Off-street parking will be available at the member's residence.
- (e) Vehicles will be locked when not attended.
- (f) All firearms, weapons and control devices will be removed from the interior of the vehicle and properly secured in the residence when the vehicle is not attended, unless the vehicle is parked in a locked garage.

703.4.3 ASSIGNED VEHICLES

It is the purpose of this policy to provide officers who have personally assigned police vehicles with guidance on their operation, use in off-duty enforcement, care, and maintenance.

Members are cautioned that under federal and local tax rules, personal use of a City vehicle may create an income tax liability for the member. Questions regarding tax rules should be directed to the member's tax adviser.

Members choosing to utilize marked patrol units to commute to and from their residence and work are required to fill out a payroll deduction form authorizing a fuel surcharge. The fee will be set based on the distance from the employee's residence to the police department. This fee will be set annually by the chief of police.

Members must have successfully completed their probationary period to be eligible for a personal assigned take-home vehicle.

Criteria for use of take-home vehicles include the following:

- (a) Vehicles shall only be used for work-related purposes and shall not be used for personal errands or transports, unless special circumstances exist and the Chief of Police, Captain, or a Sergeant gives authorization.
- (b) Vehicles may be used to transport the member to and from the member's residence for work-related purposes.
- (c) Vehicles will not be used when off-duty except:

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- (a) In circumstances when a member has been placed on call by the Chief of Police, Captain, Sergeants and there is a high probability that the member will be called back to duty.
- (b) When the member is performing a work-related function during what normally would be an off-duty period, including vehicle maintenance or traveling to or from a work-related activity or function.
- (c) When the member has received permission from the Chief of Police, Captain, or Sergeants.
- (d) When the vehicle is being used by the Chief of Police, Captain, Sergeants or members who are in on-call administrative positions.
- (e) When the vehicle is being used by on-call investigators.
- (d) While operating the vehicle, authorized members will carry and have accessible their duty firearms and be prepared to perform any function they would be expected to perform while on-duty.
- (e) The two-way communications radio, MDC and global positioning satellite device, if equipped, must be on and set to an audible volume when the vehicle is in operation.
- (f) Unattended vehicles are to be locked and secured at all times.
 - 1. No key should be left in the vehicle except when it is necessary that the vehicle be left running (e.g., continued activation of emergency lights, canine safety, equipment charging).
 - 2. All weapons shall be secured while the vehicle is unattended.
 - 3. All department identification, portable radios and equipment should be secured.
- (g) Vehicles are to be parked off-street at the member's residence unless prior arrangements have been made with the Chief of Police or the authorized designee. If the vehicle is not secured inside a locked garage, all firearms shall be removed and properly secured in the residence (see the Firearms Policy regarding safe storage of firearms at home).
 - (a) All firearms shall be removed and properly secured when parked inside underground garages of multi-unit complexes.
- (h) All equipment susceptible to temperature (hot and cold) must be stored in the appropriate climate to maintain functionality.
- (i) Vehicles parked off-street at the member's residence shall be within view of a dedicated surveillance camera. Surveillance data must be retained for a minimum of 14 days.
- (j) Vehicles are to be secured at the member's residence or the appropriate department facility, at the discretion of the Department when a member will be away (e.g., on vacation) for periods exceeding one week.
 - (a) If the vehicle remains at the residence of the member, the Department shall have access to the vehicle.

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- (b) If the member is unable to provide access to the vehicle, it shall be parked at the Department.
- (k) The member is responsible for the care and arranging for the maintenance of the vehicle.

703.4.4 ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS

When driving a take-home vehicle to and from work outside of the jurisdiction of the Mendota Heights Police Department or while off-duty, an officer shall not initiate enforcement actions except in those circumstances where a potential threat to life or serious property damage exists (see the Off-Duty Law Enforcement Actions and Law Enforcement Authority policies).

Officers may render public assistance when it is deemed prudent (e.g., to a stranded motorist).

Officers driving take-home vehicles shall be armed, appropriately attired and carry their department-issued identification. Officers should also ensure that department radio communication capabilities are maintained to the extent feasible.

703.4.5 MAINTENANCE

Members are responsible for the cleanliness (exterior and interior) and overall maintenance of their assigned vehicles. Cleaning and maintenance supplies will be provided by the Department. Failure to adhere to these requirements may result in discipline and loss of vehicle assignment. The following should be performed as outlined below:

- (a) Members shall make daily inspections of their assigned vehicles for service/maintenance requirements and damage.
- (b) It is the member's responsibility to ensure that his/her assigned vehicle is maintained according to the established service and maintenance schedule.
- (c) All scheduled vehicle maintenance and car washes shall be performed as necessary at a facility approved by the department supervisor in charge of vehicle maintenance.
- (d) The Department shall be notified of problems with the vehicle and approve any major repairs before they are performed.
- (e) All weapons shall be removed from any vehicle left for maintenance.
- (f) Supervisors shall make, at a minimum, monthly inspections of vehicles assigned to members under their command to ensure the vehicles are being maintained in accordance with this policy.

703.5 UNMARKED VEHICLES

Unmarked vehicles are assigned to various divisions and their use is restricted to the respective division and the assigned member, unless otherwise approved by a supervisor. division

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703.6 DAMAGE, ABUSE AND MISUSE

When any department vehicle is involved in a traffic collision or otherwise incurs damage, the involved member shall promptly notify a supervisor. Any collision report shall be filed with the agency having jurisdiction (see the Traffic Collisions Policy).

Damage to any department vehicle that was not caused by a traffic collision shall be immediately reported during the shift in which the damage was discovered, documented in memorandum format and forwarded to the Shift Sergeant. An administrative investigation should be initiated to determine if there has been any vehicle abuse or misuse.

703.7 PARKING

Law enforcement vehicles are not routinely exempt from incurring parking fees.

703.8 ATTIRE AND APPEARANCE

When operating any department vehicle while off-duty, members may dress in a manner appropriate for their intended activity. Whenever in view of or in contact with the public, attire and appearance, regardless of the activity, should be suitable to reflect positively upon the Department.