

Herndon (VA) Police Department

Officer Traffic Safety

The Town of Herndon is the third largest incorporated town in Virginia, comprised of 4.25 square miles. It is situated in western Fairfax County, just minutes from Dulles International Airport and approximately 25 miles from Washington, DC. The town has 11 parks. HPD is nationally accredited through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies. **Under the leadership of Chief Maggie Deboard are 54 police officers and 18 civilian personnel.**

The department sent two sworn members to the Below 100 training in 2018, which is a common sense training program on safety areas under an officer's control, with particular focus on such elements as seatbelts, vests, driving tactics and proper procedures. The officers then returned and conducted training for the entire department. The two officers used the Below 100 template for the training, but also incorporated HPD's own relevant traffic policies into the instruction.

Sworn officers attend two weeks of Emergency Vehicle Operations (EVO) training when they go through the academy. After graduation, officers are required to attend EVO training every three years. Training is conducted at the academy track and officers drive the same vehicles they operate on duty. EVO training involves high speed driving and decision making, pursuit operations and policy review, cone courses and accident avoidance, and inclement weather driving on a specialized skid pan to simulate icy roadway conditions. **HPD has several trained instructors who assist academy staff in conducting EVO training for the department.** These instructors also assist academy staff several times a year when conducting EVO training for new recruits. This allows the department's part-time EVO instructors to hone their teaching and driving skills in this area. **One of their EVO instructors is also tasked with providing classroom-based pursuit training annually for all sworn department members.** This training covers our department policy, liability and relevant case law. Videos of police pursuits located online are often used to illustrate the dangers involved in pursuit and response driving.

All police vehicles are equipped with an automatic vehicle locator (AVL) that provides real-time location and tracking management. This helps dispatchers to effectively deploy officers to calls, maximize efficiency and time, and provides a critical safety feature to assist in quickly locating an officer's vehicle when they are not responding to the radio. The new Axon body worn camera system currently being implemented in the department will provide an additional GPS tracking device to assist in quickly locating an officer on foot and away from their vehicle.

The department currently utilizes Panasonic in-car cameras but is in the process of transitioning to the Axon camera system, with built in license plate readers (LPR). In addition to the forward-facing front camera, HPD's vehicles are equipped with rear-facing cameras and back-seat cameras so officers can safely watch suspects during transport. In-car cameras automatically initiate when an officer turns on their emergency lights to ensure driving behaviors and citizen encounters are captured on video.

The department also has dash cameras in each of the department's cruisers are set to automatically turn on when the vehicle reaches 65 mph. The main purpose of this feature is to ensure pursuits or high-speed emergency response driving is captured on both the violator and the officer. Automatic recording of vehicles traveling at high speeds also serves as an accountability measure. Although these activations are not automatically sent to supervisors, **the video is subject to being randomly selected for audit. Video audits of both in-car and BWCs must be conducted monthly by all squad supervisors. If policy violations are discovered, supervisors have the option of handling them formally or informally, depending on the nature of the violation, severity of the incident and past performance of the officer.**

All vehicle accidents are required to be formally investigated through the internal affairs process. **Over the past 5 years, from 2017-2021, officers have been involved in a total of only 18 at fault vehicle accidents. None of the 18 at-fault accidents were the result of excessive speed. Most of these accidents involved low speeds in parking lots or while slowing or stopped on the roadway.** The department has several officers trained in traffic accident reconstruction. These officers investigate accidents resulting in serious injuries or fatalities, as well as serious cruiser accidents.

Personnel are required to always wear seat belts while on duty. This applies to both town-owned vehicles and to rental cars being operated by department personnel. Signs were installed on both exit gates to the department's secured parking lot to remind officers to always buckle up and be cognizant of their speed. Officers are also required by policy to wear their yellow, high-visibility traffic vests when working traffic assignments or while working accident scenes on the roadways. Training on the pursuit policy is conducted annually and documented. Training consists of policy review, case law discussion, liability and/or review of video incidents of pursuits that are available for discussion and training.

All pursuits are formally investigated and documented through the department's internal affairs process. When policy violations occur, officers receive discipline in accordance with the seriousness of the violation and past performance. Remedial training is mandated in cases where it is warranted. The department's pursuit policy was changed a few years ago to narrow the circumstances when a **pursuit can be initiated, limiting pursuits to incidents involving crimes of violence or of an immediate threat to public safety. This has resulted in a significant reduction of pursuits over the past three years from 3 in 2018 to only 1 total between the years of 2019-2021.**

To reduce the chances of our officers being struck, stop sticks were recently removed from all department vehicles and eliminated as an authorized tool to stop fleeing vehicles due to the danger posed to the officer deploying them. Roadblocks and pit maneuvers are still permitted as tactics to stop fleeing vehicles if the officer has attended the specific EVOC training courses for these tactics and maintained proficiency through retraining.

Recently, a drone was obtained on grant funding that will allow accident reconstruction to be done from the air, eliminating the need to close roadways or place officers in the roadway to conduct accident scene mapping/reconstruction and photo documentation. This program will be initiated, and training conducted for ARU investigators, once department policy on the drone program is finalized.

**** This summary is only a brief overview of many of the agency's programs. In the actual submission you will see that the agency has other programs and incentives to benefit its members. Please review their entire submission and its associated documents to gain a complete understanding of their program.**