



# MEMO

**To:** Larry Boyd, Chief of Police  
**From:** Brian G. Redburn, Captain, South Patrol Division  
**Date:** March 2, 2012  
**Subject:** Pursuit Board Annual Review and Recommendations

Pursuant to General Order 306.14, the Pursuit Review Board was convened to discuss pursuit data for the 2011 calendar year. The members of this year's board were Sgt. Tony Dunlop, Sgt. John Orr, Sgt. Michael Braly, Officer Vincent Dalesandro, Officer Jeff Parsons, and Officer Steve Smith. The relevant data considered by the board is compiled and outlined in the Professional Standards Annual Pursuit Analysis Report. The general pursuit data was overall very similar to last year's data:

- The frequency of pursuits was highest during the month of August (11)
- The most frequent weekday of occurrence was Saturday (24.5%)
- Traffic offenses continue to be the most common initiating event (38.8%)
- 44% of all pursuits were less than two miles in distance, and 95.9% were less than ten miles in distance
- 69% lasted three minutes or less
- 28.6% resulted in no arrest because the suspect escaped

Additionally, certain notable, longer-term trend characteristics, identified in the table below, seem particularly useful in evaluating how the department's pursuit policy has affected pursuit tendencies over the last four years.

Year	Pursuits	No. > 8 Mins.	Supv. Term.	Off. Term	Accidents
2008	68	18	6	5	12
2009	60	10	9	9	16
2010	43	4	11	1	5
2011	49	4	5	4	15

This data suggests that vehicle pursuits are trending downward. The board attributes this trend in substantial part to the department's strong philosophical stance that motorcycle pursuits are highly disfavored. In the board's opinion, patrol officers have responded to this philosophical change by choosing not to initiate motorcycle pursuits without good cause.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Four of the six motorcycle pursuits were initiated for a suspected felony offense. Five of the six motorcycle pursuits occurred between 7/7/11 and 8/8/11, including three motorcycle pursuits in one day on 8/2/11.

Significantly, with the exception of 2010, officers and supervisors are terminating pursuits at roughly equivalent rates. The relatively even distribution of termination decisions suggests that officers are generally taking more responsibility for evaluating pursuit conditions and are becoming accustomed to terminating pursuits themselves, instead of relying on supervisors to make the decision.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the data regarding pursuits in excess of eight minutes in duration suggests that both officers and supervisors are more critical of protracted pursuits and are terminating them sooner.<sup>3</sup>

Paradoxically, the number of pursuit accidents increased disproportionately in 2011.<sup>4</sup> This seemingly anomalous fact is bothersome to explain. Interestingly, two-thirds of the pursuit accidents in 2011 occurred outside of the city limits, which seems to reinforce the correctness of classifying “leaving the city limits” as a high risk factor in the department’s pursuit policy. One possible explanation for the high rate of pursuit accidents outside of the city limits is that the fleeing offenders become increasingly desperate as the pursuit progresses in time and distance, leading to the offender committing riskier maneuvers in an effort to get away.

In fourteen of the fifteen pursuit accidents, an underlying felony, DWI offense, or both were the suspected motivations for the offender’s flight.<sup>5</sup> Only one pursuit accident inside the city limits stemmed exclusively from a simple traffic violation. This data reinforces what every police officer intuitively knows—that DWI drivers and auto theft suspects represent a higher risk of becoming involved in an accident than other types of offenders. Perhaps the disproportionately high accident rate outside of the city limits is partially attributable to the officers and supervisors becoming more selective in deciding which suspects should be pursued beyond the city limits—reserving this activity only for known felony offenders and those who pose a significant risk to the community.<sup>6</sup> Thus, although the accident rate is counterintuitive and not easily explained in light of other pursuit trends, it may nevertheless lend additional anecdotal support to the pursuit policy’s suspected impact on officer and supervisor behavior.

### **Recommendations**

The board recommends that supervisors continue to reinforce the pursuit policy through periodic roll call training throughout the year. Officer familiarity with the pursuit matrix and the risk factors provides the best chance that the positive trend will continue. Additionally, it was recommended that the police department begin tracking division pursuit data. The pursuit critique form was modified to capture the division assignments for the primary and supporting officers. Finally, the accident data from last year’s pursuit analysis should be shared with all officers so that this information can be incorporated into their decision making process for future pursuits. No other recommendations were made.

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<sup>2</sup> However, officers seemed more reluctant to terminate pursuits that left the city limits. Supervisors were responsible for terminating five of the six pursuits terminated beyond the city limits.

<sup>3</sup> This observation is further supported by comparing the occurrences of pursuits of exceptional duration. In 2008, two pursuits lasted between twenty-two and thirty-one minutes, and in 2009 one pursuit lasted over an hour in duration. In 2011, no pursuit lasted longer than fifteen minutes.

<sup>4</sup> 29% of all pursuits resulted in an accident in 2011, compared to only 12% in 2010.

<sup>5</sup> The offenses included two narcotics offenses, five stolen vehicles, and five DWI’s

<sup>6</sup> In all, twenty-three pursuits left the city limits. Five of the thirteen non-accident pursuits were terminated by a supervisor, and one was terminated by an officer.