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Guidelines for Off-Site Removal of Deceased Persons at Collisions

Fatality traffic collisions frequently result in long road closures affecting thousands of motorists. When a fatality occurs at a traffic collision, it is considered to be a crime scene and the appropriate law enforcement agency conducts a collision investigation and the county coroner conducts a death investigation. During these investigations, it is important to balance the need to conduct a thorough investigation with the need to respect the dignity and privacy of the deceased and the deceased's family. It is also important to prevent onlookers from viewing the deceased whenever possible and to restore the flow of traffic as soon as possible.

The Washington State Patrol (WSP), Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), and Island County Coroner recognize there are times when extrication of deceased victims trapped inside vehicles is best accomplished at another location out of public view. In these cases, transporting the vehicle to another location maintains the privacy and dignity of the victim and the victim's family, provides a safer environment for Fire/EMS responders to perform the extrication, and expedites reopening of the roadway.

THEREFORE: When off-site extrication of remains is a possibility, we have agreed to the following guidelines:

1. Law enforcement has jurisdiction over the scene. The coroner has jurisdiction over the deceased. The decision to remove a vehicle with a deceased inside for off-site extrication will be a mutual decision between the incident commander(s) and coroner/deputy coroner at the scene.

2. If the vehicle is to be removed, WSDOT Incident Response personnel will securely tarp the vehicle to ensure the human remains are not visible and that no evidence and/or property is lost during transport.

3. The vehicle will be transported on a flatbed transport vehicle to a mutually agreeable facility out of public view for extrication.

4. During the transport, the deputy coroner (and other investigating officer[s] if appropriate) will follow the transporting vehicle to the off-site facility to preserve the chain of evidence.

5. After the deceased has been removed from the vehicle, the investigating law enforcement agency will assume control of the vehicle for evidentiary and disposition purposes.

Dated:

5-14-07	April 30, 2007	
Chief John R. Batiste Washington State Patrol	Robert Bishop Island County Coroner	Secretary Douglas B. MacDonald Department of Transportation