

Policy C

Procedures for Cellular Telephone Callers Reporting an Incident in Progress

Approved by ETSC 2/2/96

Background:

An increasing number of calls for service are from persons on mobile telephones. Because of their mobility, these people are often witnessing events as they happen, and sometimes they follow suspects themselves.

Reporting an event in progress is useful for law enforcement. However, a citizen following a suspect is subjected to potential danger. If the PSAP encourages this behavior, the PSAP could become liable for personal injuries or damage to property which result.

Therefore, the PSAP should warn a citizen not to attempt to chase a suspect.

If a caller fails to heed the warning and continues to follow a suspect, the PSAP has a responsibility to take and use the information in the best way it can.

The following policy is suggested to Public Service Answering Points (PSAPs) when a mobile phone caller reports an incident in progress:

1. Obtain the caller's name and mobile phone number (in case callback is necessary).
2. Get all pertinent information on subject, situation, vehicles, etc.
3. If caller is following a suspect, give the following warning: "We cannot be responsible for your safety. We advise you not to follow anyone. We will take care of the situation."
4. Terminate the call if the person stops pursuing the vehicle. Make sure you have enough information to get back in contact with the caller as a witness, etc. If the caller indicates he (or she) will continue following the suspect, get a description of the caller (and vehicle, if applicable) and notify a supervisor.
5. It will be the supervisor's decision whether to send the call to dispatch after checking with the appropriate dispatcher. Factors will include (but are not limited to) the nature of the call, the number and nature of other calls, status of available patrol cars, etc.
6. If the call does not go to a dispatcher, continue to update the supervisor with the latest information from the caller.
7. If the call goes to dispatch, the supervisor will assist the dispatcher by monitoring the call while the dispatcher handles radio traffic. Do not ask the caller questions which would indicate they are being encouraged to chase. However, questions for clarification of information or about the caller's safety may be asked.
8. All operators should be alerted in case other people attempt to call about the incident or in case the call is disconnected and the original caller calls back. (Mobile calls can often be disconnected accidentally as a vehicle moves through different areas.)