

**Use of Vehicles for County Business**

**Section I:**

**1.0 Overview**

As a driver of a county vehicle, the authorized driver has been given certain privileges, but employees are cautioned that they should have no expectation of privacy while using County vehicles. The County reserves the right to monitor and track drivers in county vehicles utilizing the **Global Positioning System (GPS)**. County vehicles are a highly visible reflection of county government and therefore drivers of these vehicles are expected to drive safely and in appropriate places at all times. GPS may also be used for other business-related purposes, including but not limited to, improving customer service, managing productivity, locating stolen vehicles, providing aid to vehicles that break down, increasing employee safety, engine diagnostics for preventive maintenance, protecting assets effectively, or ensuring that employees are following their routes or assignments. Only the County Manager/Department Heads, or their designee, will have access to the GPS system regarding employee vehicle reporting and determine the County vehicles in which GPS technology will be installed. As a county driver, he/she assumes the duty of obeying all motor vehicle laws, maintaining the vehicle properly at all times and, otherwise, following the policies and procedures outlined in the following.

**2.0 County Vehicle Fleet Purposes**

County vehicles are provided to support business activities and are to be used only by qualified and authorized employees. County vehicle means any licensed motor vehicle owned, rented, borrowed or leased by the County of Bladen. Rental vehicles are considered county vehicles when rented by a duly authorized employee and used for official county business. They are not to be considered a part of an employee's compensation and must not be used as an inducement for employment. In all cases, these vehicles are to be operated in strict compliance with motor vehicle laws of the jurisdiction in which they are driven and with the utmost regard for their care and cost efficient use.

- An employee whose job entails authorized use of a County vehicle for commuting to and from work should be aware that this usage could be a taxable fringe benefit.
- County vehicles may not be used for business activities of other companies.

Agencies may adopt additional departmental policies provided they do not conflict with the provisions of this policy. Please note that appropriate (County Manager or agency Board of Directors) approval must be obtained before implementation.

**3.0 Driver Licensing**

County drivers and anyone authorized to drive the County vehicles must have a valid North Carolina driver's license for the class of vehicle being operated and must be able to drive vehicle. Obtaining a driver's license is a personal expense.

**4.0 Driver Qualifications**

Driver qualifications are as follows:

1. Authorized individual, employee, elected official, appointee or other individual as provided by law who is in control of a county vehicle and is authorized by the County of Bladen.
2. Must possess a valid license in the class of vehicle operated.

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3. Must possess a valid North Carolina operator's license (privilege to drive in North Carolina is in good standing).

#### **5.0 Review of Motor Vehicle Record**

State motor vehicle records (MVRs) will be used as the source for verifying driver history. MVRs will be obtained and reviewed at least **annually**. Driving privileges may be withdrawn or suspended and/or the County vehicles removed for any authorized driver not meeting the above requirements. In addition, appropriate disciplinary action may be taken. **North Carolina Transportation Notification System** is a companion database with the Division of Motor Vehicles database. In an effort to mitigate the potential negative consequences of high-risk driving behavior, every county employee that drives either county vehicles or their personal vehicles to conduct county business is required to sign a Transit Driver Notification System Driver's Disclosure form to authorize Bladen County to connect your driving record with the County as your employer. Once the process is completed, the Department of Motor Vehicles will notify Bladen County when an employee is convicted of a driving offense.

#### **6.0 Guidelines for the Use of County Owned Vehicle**

- a. County vehicles may not be used for private purposes or for entertainment while off-duty. County vehicles should never be used to run personal errands, such as shopping for groceries, attending sporting events, or any other non-governmental purposes. Exceptions would be approved when on overnight trip, but travel to adult entertainment facilities is prohibited even if away on business. Sightseeing or trips for personal pleasure are prohibited unless the trip is part of the official agenda for a business conference.
- b. Non-County employees may accompany County employees if they have business interest in the travel; however they are not allowed to drive the County vehicle. (Exceptions may be allowed in law enforcement and certain emergency situations in Emergency Services.) Children/spouse of County employees may not be passengers in County vehicles driven by employees of County. Exceptions may be approved by County Manager.
- c. Smoking or any other use of tobacco products is not permitted in any County owned vehicle.
- d. Hitchhikers are not permitted.
- e. Family pets are not permitted in County vehicles.
- f. Radar detectors are not allowed in County vehicles.
- g. Traffic violations and associated expenses are the responsibility of the assigned driver. The County will not be responsible for the cost of locking a key in the vehicle.
- h. Possession, transportation or consumption of alcohol or illegal substances by anyone in the vehicle is prohibited.
- i. Under no circumstances may a County employee operate a County vehicle while under the influence of intoxicating beverages, drugs or illegal substances, or transport these items in County vehicle.
- j. All occupants in the vehicle must use seat belts. Appropriate safety restraints must be used for children.
- k. Cell phones should only be used by non-emergency personnel when vehicle is safely stopped.
- l. Drivers shall not eat or engage in any activity that may hinder the driver's attentiveness.

Violation of these rules will result in disciplinary action.

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**7.0 Safety for the Employee and Passengers**

The driver and all occupants must wear seat belts (lap and shoulder belt even if the vehicle is equipped with an air bag) when the vehicle is in motion. The General Statutes of North Carolina also require children to be protected by safety restraints. The law covers all persons, not parents, who operate a vehicle in which a child is a passenger. Under the safety belt law, all occupants **MUST** wear safety belts even if the vehicle is equipped with air bags, to include passenger vans. If the vehicle is equipped with automatic shoulder harnesses, the lap belt **MUST** also be worn.

It is the driver's responsibility to ensure that age appropriate vehicle seats are correctly installed in the vehicle and are used when transporting children.

*Adult Safety Points:* Everyone is required to buckle-up with both lap and shoulder belts on every trip. Air bags are supplemental protection devices. The lap belt should be worn under the abdomen and low across the hips. The shoulder portion should come over the collarbone away from the neck and cross over the breastbone. The shoulder belt in most new vehicles can be adjusted on the side pillar to improve fit.

**8.0 Child Safety**

In some departments children are transported regularly. All such passengers shall be properly secured in a child passenger restraint system or seat belt which meets federal standards applicable at the time of the vehicle's manufacture.

A child less than eight years of age and less than 80 pounds in weight shall be properly secured in a weight appropriate child passenger restraint system. In vehicles equipped with an active passenger-side front air bag, a child less than twelve years of age and less than 80 pounds in weight shall be properly secured in the rear seat unless the child restraint system is designed for use with air bags.

**a. Booster Seats and Safety Belts for Children**

Booster seats should be used for children who have outgrown their standard safety seats at about 80 pounds and until they are big enough for seat belts. Adult safety belts should not be used for children until they are big enough for the seat belt to fit correctly. The lap safety belt must fit snugly across the child's hip, not across the stomach. The Shoulder portion of a lap/shoulder belt must fall across the shoulder and chest, not across the face or throat. For shoulder belts that do not fit, belt positioning booster seats designed to raise a child up for a proper fit of the lap and shoulder belts are readily available.

**b. Child Safety Points**

Children 12 and under should ride buckled up in a rear seat. Infants in rear-facing child safety seats should **NEVER** ride in the front seat of a vehicle with a passenger side airbag. Small children should ride in a rear seat approved for their age and size.

If a Child over one year old must ride in the front seat with passenger-side air bag, put the child in a front-facing full harness child restraint, a belt-positioning booster seat, or a correct fitting lap/shoulder belt and move the seat as far back as possible.

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### **9.0 Maintenance**

A transportation coordinator should be designated in each department who will be responsible for monitoring when the vehicles need servicing. All drivers shall walk around the vehicle checking for body damage, county decal, lost / stolen license tags, tire condition and air pressure and leaky fluids before operating the vehicle. Vehicles will normally be serviced at 3,000/5,000 miles interval based on the requirements of each vehicle. Drivers are expected to report any mechanical problems to the coordinator immediately upon return to the agency. Vehicle warranty service shall be completed at a dealership. Vehicle maintenance/service will be scheduled by the agency coordinator with the Bladen County Motor Pool Department. Drivers shall routinely check vehicle gauges to ensure oil level, water and antifreeze for radiators and water for battery are working properly. Tire inflation should also be routinely checked.

In the event of an accident or break-down, please notify the transportation coordinator or department head immediately. If the accident occurs after hours, please call as soon as possible on the next working day. If you should require assistance after hours please call the designated person. If the vehicle requires towing, the driver should call 911 who will call a wrecker service. The vehicle should be towed to a location selected by the County. Emergency repairs may be completed by an authorized repair shop when outside of the County only when authorized by the Department Head in consultation with the Operations Director and/or County Manager.

### **10.0 Personal Cars Used for County Business**

Use of a personal vehicle is appropriate if it is authorized by the department head and within budget funds. Mileage reimbursement is provided at the current effective rate if use of a personal vehicle is authorized and a county vehicle is unavailable. The employee will be reimbursed at one-half the current reimbursement rate when a county vehicle is available, but the employee chooses to drive his/her personal vehicle.

Bladen County does not assume any liability for bodily injuries or property damage, the employee may become personally obligated to pay, arising out of an accident occurring in connection with operation of his/her own car. The County does not specify and assumes no responsibility for any insurance coverage employees carry on their own cars since this is a matter of individual status and preference. Any person, using their personal vehicle for County business must meet the following criteria:

- Satisfy the County driver qualification requirements.
- Policy requires employee to maintain insurance coverage as appropriate for use of vehicle at work.
- The vehicle must pass the North Carolina Annual Safety Inspection.
- The employee must attend a safe driving class as provided by Bladen County.

### **11.0 Traffic Violations**

Fines for parking or moving violations are the personal responsibility of the assigned operator. The County will not condone nor excuse ignorance of traffic citations that result in court summons being directed to the County as owner of the vehicle.

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Each driver is required to report all moving violations to the department head within 72 hours. This requirement applies to violations involving the use of any vehicle (County, personal or other) while on County business. Failure to report violations may result in appropriate disciplinary action.

Please be aware that traffic violations incurred during non-business (personal use) hours will affect your driving status as well and are subject to review.

#### **12.0 Accidents Involving County Vehicles or Personal Vehicles Being Used for County Business**

- Do not admit negligence or liability.
- Do not attempt settlement, regardless of how minor.
- Request name, address and phone number of injured person and witnesses if possible.
- Exchange vehicle identification, insurance company name and policy numbers with the other driver.
- Take a photograph of the accident scene, if possible.
- Call Law Enforcement.
- Complete the accident report on your vehicle.
- Notify your department head immediately, but no later than 24 hours following an accident. All accident related information shall be submitted to the department head within 24 hours.

#### **13.0 Post-Accident Drug and Alcohol Screening**

**See Article VIII - Drug and Alcohol Free Workplace; 5.0 C - Drug and Alcohol Tests - Post Accident**

#### **14.0 Thefts**

In the event of theft of a County vehicle, notify local police immediately. Once police notification has been made, the department head shall be notified immediately.

#### **15.0 Driver Responsibilities**

Each driver is responsible for the actual care and use of the County vehicle in his or her possession. Therefore, a driver's responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Operation of the vehicle in a manner consistent with reasonable practices that avoid abuse, theft, neglect or disrespect of the equipment.
- Obey all traffic laws.
- The use of seat belts and shoulder harness is mandatory for driver and passengers.
- Adhering to manufacture's recommendations regarding service, maintenance and inspection. Vehicle should not be operated with any defect that would prevent safe operation.
- Attention to and practice of safe driving techniques and adherence to current safety requirements.

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- Restricting the use of vehicle to authorized driver only.
- Reporting the occurrence of moving violation and/or loss of driving privileges.
- Accurate, comprehensive and timely reporting of all accidents by an authorized driver and thefts of a County vehicle to the Human Resources office.

Certain drugs and medical conditions may slow a driver down and reduce their ability to make decisions and process information rapidly thus impairing driving performance. It is the responsibility of the employee to alert his/her supervisor of any medical condition or medication which may affect his/her ability to safely operate a vehicle.

Failure to comply with any of these responsibilities will result in disciplinary action.

#### **16.0 Preventable Accidents**

A preventable accident is defined as any accident in which the driver in question failed to exercise every **reasonable precaution** to prevent the accident.

##### Classification of preventable accidents

- Following too close
- Driving too fast for conditions
- Failure to observe clearances
- Failure to obey signs
- Improper turns
- Failure to observe signals from other drivers
- Failure to reduce speed
- Improper parking
- Improper passing
- Failure to yield
- Improper backing
- Failure to obey traffic signals or directions
- Exceeding the posted speed limit
- Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) or Driving Under the Influence (DUI) or similar charges.

Employees involved in accidents and charged with one of the above offenses, or other offenses which reflect negligence on the part of the employee, are subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

#### **Section II:**

##### **1.0 Purpose**

Bladen County has the responsibility to ensure, to the best of its ability, all vehicle operators are properly licensed and maintain a safe driving record. Current employees, volunteers, and applications for employment must possess an appropriate and valid North Carolina driver's license in order to maintain or be appointed to positions requiring driving duties, whether it is a

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County-owned/leased vehicle or privately-owned /leased vehicle. All employees and/or applicants are subject to the guidelines on such effective date of policy.

#### **2.0 Applicants**

A driving history shall be obtained on final application for an applicant who may be required to operate any County-owned/leased vehicle or any privately owned/leased vehicle on behalf of the County. Applicants must possess a valid North Carolina driver's license as a condition of employment when applying for positions requiring driving duties.

- Applicants will not be considered for positions requiring driving duties if their driving record contains convictions for any Type A violation within the last three (3) years.
- Applicants who have been convicted of four (4) or more Type B violations within the last two (2) years will not be considered for employment; or three (3) or more Type B violations within one year or less.
- When an applicant's overall driving record reveals a pattern of convictions indicating the applicant's ability to safely operate a County vehicle or piece of heavy equipment is questionable, the County reserves the right to approve or disapprove the applicant based on their overall driving history.
- The department head will request HR to obtain the applicant's driving record prior to offering the position.

Based upon satisfactory findings after review of the complete driving record, Human Resources should certify in writing on the "comments" section of the Personnel Action Form that employment of the selected applicant will not violate the Safe Driving Policy.

#### **3.0 Current Employees**

All employees who drive County-owned/leased vehicles driven for the benefit of the County, or operate heavy equipment on roadways or access roads, which requires a valid North Carolina driver's license, must possess and maintain such valid driver's license and safe driving record in order to retain County driving privileges. These employees will be required to attend a safe driving class every three years. Random driving histories for employees who drive for the benefit of the County may be run as necessary. Employees who will be using their personal vehicle for County business should contact their personal automobile insurance company in order to ensure that they have proper coverage for such uses.

The Human Resources Department or designee shall run driving records for new employees and those requesting to transfer into a position requiring driving duties, as well as, positions identified by department heads to be utilized for driving duties, although driving is not the main function of that position.

Employees will not be permitted to operate County-owned/leased vehicles or heavy equipment or operate a privately-owned/leased vehicle for the benefit of the County if their driving record contains any of the following.

- Conviction for any Type A Violation within the past three (3) years.

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- Conviction of four(4) or more Type B violations within the last two(2) years, or three(3) or more Type B violations within the past one year or less.
- When an employee's overall driving record reveals a pattern of convictions and the employee's ability to safely operate a County vehicle or piece of heavy equipment is questionable, the County reserves the right to approve or disapprove driving privileges based on their overall driving history.

Employees who are in positions requiring driving duties, even on a limited basis, who have their license suspended or revoked, or convicted of a Type A Violation shall report such suspension/revocation/conviction, as well as, all Type B violations to their supervisor within 24 hours. The supervisor shall in turn notify the Department Head and Human Resources Department.

Employees are subject to disciplinary action, dependent upon the motor vehicle violation. In cases where an employee is in a position which requires driving as a condition of employment, and such employee's license is suspended or revoked, the employee may be transferred or demoted into a non-driving position if it is available, the employee meets qualifications and it is in the best interest of the County. If no such position exists, or a transfer or demotion is deemed in the best interest of the County, the employee may be terminated. County employees with a limited driving privilege may not operate a county vehicle.

## **4.0 Violations**

### **4.1 Type A Violations**

- a. Driving while impaired or under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- b. Homicide, manslaughter or assault by vehicle; or use of vehicle in commission of a felony.
- c. Reckless driving/speeding.
- d. Failure to stop (hit and run) failure to report an accident.
- e. Making a false accident report.
- f. Passing a stopped school bus.
- g. Driving while license is suspended or revoked.
- h. Attempting to elude a police officer.

### **4.2 Type B Violations**

- a. All other moving violations not listed as a Type A violation.

## **Section III**

### **1.0 Guidelines and Procedures**

Bladen County wants to ensure that vehicles under the control of the county are acquired, utilized, replaced and maintained in the most efficient and effective manner to conduct county business.

#### **1(a) Vehicle Records**

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- All county vehicles owned by the county must be properly titled, licensed and insured.
- To the extent possible, all direct costs owning and operating county vehicles must be fully documented, including original purchase price, sale price, fuel, maintenance and other expenses.
- Appropriate managerial review of vehicle cost and use information should be conducted on a regular basis.

#### **1(b) Vehicle Acquisition**

- All county vehicles shall be purchased in accordance with NCGS 143-131, 143-129 or other controlling statutes.
- Agencies shall acquire vehicles consistent with budgetary intent.

#### **1(c) Vehicle Replacement**

Agencies should evaluate the cost per mile to operate vehicles taking into consideration acquisition costs, average surplus value and operating costs such as fuel, maintenance and other administrative charges. Agencies should strive to replace vehicles at the point where the vehicle's total operating cost per mile is the lowest. Absent this analysis, the minimum replacement criteria for county vehicles are outlined below. Any request to replace vehicles is subject to budgetary review. Specialty use vehicles (vehicles especially equipped for a specific function or purpose) are exempt from these replacement criteria.

#### **1(d) Vehicle Assignment**

Permanently assigned vehicles are dedicated to a single job function or individual based on travel needs for a semi-permanent time period. County vehicles shall not be permanently assigned unless they are assigned to:

- a. An individual traveling more than 15,000 miles per year in the conduct of county business; or
- b. Job functions/employees requiring specialty use vehicles; or
- c. Job functions requiring frequent transportation in the performance of specific duties (e.g. mail, delivery, facility support vehicles, etc.); or
- d. A person specifically identified by a department director or agency head. The department director or agency head must determine there is a compelling benefit to the county and documents in writing that they support and approve the assignment.

Permanently assigned vehicle shall not be used for commuting purposes, unless the:

- a. Vehicle is assigned to an employee who works from his/her home; or
- b. Employee needs to operate specialty use vehicle to perform official duties and is subject to 24-hour call; or

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- c. Employee is subject to 24-hour call and responds to after hour calls an average of four or more times per month; or
- d. Department director or agency head determines there is a compelling benefit to the county and documents in writing that they support and recommend the assignment, for approval by County Manager.

Pool vehicles are general use vehicles available for temporary assignment to multiple individuals.

- a. Pool vehicles should average at least 15,000 miles per year.
- b. Pool vehicles should be used when available and where more cost effective than other options.

**2.0 Vehicle Usage**

County vehicles shall be used for county business only. Some examples of unauthorized use are:

- a. Travel to adult entertainment facilities.
- b. Sightseeing or trips for personal pleasure unless the trip is part of the official agenda for a business conference.
- c. Transporting family members, dependents or friends to school, daycare, medical appointments, social events or other personal activities.
- d. Conducting other personal business

However, it is permissible to use a county vehicle for travel to meals or to attend to other necessities of the operator or authorized passenger when away from their official domicile on county business.

Agencies shall investigate complaints for alleged improper operation or use of a county vehicle. The operator may be subject to disciplinary action if the complaint is verified, in accordance with the Separation, Disciplinary Action, and Reinstatement policy.

Liability to other persons (bodily injury and property damage) due to employee negligence in the operation of a county vehicle will be covered by the county, provided the employee was operating the vehicle while conducting county business. The operator assumes full responsibility for bodily injury and damages to the vehicle and/or third party damages if an accident occurs during any unauthorized use of a county vehicle.

Personal property in county vehicles is not insured for loss or damage by the county. Coverage for these items may be provided by the employee's personal insurance.

Agencies should review accident investigations involving county vehicles in an effort to avoid reoccurrence. Employees found to have operated a vehicle in a careless manner or in violation of state law or departmental policy or procedures will be placed in "Marginal Driving Status" (see Appendix A - Safe Driving Practices Policy) and will be subject to disciplinary action, in accordance with the Separation, Disciplinary Action, and Reinstatement policy.

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County vehicles should not be used for out-of-state travel, unless specifically authorized by the Department Head or County Manager.

Animals are not allowed in county vehicles unless they are transported in the conduct of county business or are required by a passenger's disability.