



Traffic Direction

METL Training Material

Virginia Defense Force

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Traffic Control

Traffic direction is one of the most dangerous duties a Virginia Defense Force soldier can perform. By stepping out into the roadway, in the middle of moving vehicles, we place ourselves in the path of 3000 pound missiles guided by individuals who often have hundreds of other things going on in their lives besides the duty to control the path of their vehicle. When we step out and place ourselves in that environment, we must make sure that we do so with the utmost skill, knowledge, and focus on the task, and with legal authority. Without such attention to all of these issues, we can create a medical as well as legal nightmare for ourselves and others.

Legal Authority

Virginia Defense Force soldiers must have a legal basis for stepping into the street and directing traffic. Without such legal authority, we place ourselves outside the law, and could be arrested for interfering with traffic.

In the event that we are not authorized to engage in traffic direction, and should we become involved in a situation where someone is injured due to our negligence, the VDF itself would become liable for any damages, and not be covered under the Commonwealth's insurance umbrella. While that might be bad enough, if we engaged in traffic direction without special orders, we could be held personally liable for damages and injuries to others. In addition, we likely would not be covered under worker's compensation because we would have acted outside of the scope of our duties, and without permission and authority.

In times of disaster, with such declaration by the Governor, traffic duty would be directed by official documentation. That legal authority giving Virginia Defense Force personnel duties in the street directing traffic would be granted, for the most part, with the same traffic directing authority as the State Police.

Where Virginia Defense Force soldiers need to be particularly careful is in working local events in non-State Active Duty (SAD) status. Those events are not covered by disaster declarations granting authority. Virginia Code section 46.2-1310 does allow a local police chief or sheriff to ***“deputize persons over the age of 18 years of age, for the limited purpose of directing traffic in accordance with 46.2-1309 during periods of heavy traffic or congestion. Such persons shall first receive training as the chief of police or sheriff determines necessary to fully acquaint such persons with techniques of traffic control. THEY SHALL NOT HAVE ARREST POWERS.”*** (Emphasis added.)

Further, ***“Any person who is deputized as provided in the forgoing provisions of this section, shall at all times while engaged in traffic control wear a distinctive uniform, safety vest, or white reflectorized belt, which crosses both chest and back above the waist.”***

Our presence in the street must be authorized by some legal authority. Without such authority, we have no business directing traffic in the street. Many local events have used Virginia Defense Force soldiers for assistance in parking venues such as open fields, and parking lots. While they are not what most consider the streets as we normally associate with 46.2-1309 and 46.2-1310, they are open to the public during these events with which we assist, and we should make sure we use all procedures as outlined in the Code of Virginia, especially 46.2-1309 below.

Virginia Code section 46-2-1309 designates how law enforcement officers and uniformed school crossing guards may direct traffic by signals. It sets out in the code that:

- 1. To stop traffic by hand- Stand with shoulders parallel to moving traffic. Raise arms forty-five degrees above shoulder with hand extended, palm towards moving traffic to be stopped.***
- 2. To move traffic by hand- Stand with shoulders parallel to traffic to be moved. Extend right arm and hand full length at height of shoulders towards such traffic, fingers extended and joined, palm down. Bring hand sharply in direction traffic is to move. Repeat movement with left arm and hand to start traffic from opposite direction.***
- 3. To stop and start traffic by whistle- One blast, moving traffic to stop; two blasts, traffic in opposite direction to move.***
- 4. Emergency stop of traffic by whistle- Three or more, short blasts, all traffic shall immediately clear the intersection and stop.***

Equipment

The Virginia Code sets out some requirements for directing traffic- vests, white belts, and whistles. The white crossed belts are probably an oversight in the Virginia law. While military, school crossing guards, and even student safety patrols used such belts years ago, Federal law now requires much more in the way of reflectorized safety vests for all personnel working in or around the roadway.

Vest

Regulations require that personnel directing traffic shall wear an ANSI II rated vest. The ANSI II specification ensures that there are a required number of inches of brightly colored and reflectorized material in the vest, thus affording us with the best possible visibility by the motoring public. Old ANSI I or small jogger style vests, with limited surface area should be discarded and replaced with ANSI II vests. There are ANSI II vests made with tear away hook and loop fasteners that allow for a vest to be torn away should it become snagged or entangled in a passing vehicle. There are numerous color configurations and reflectorized material patterns on the market as well. As long as they are ANSI II rated or better, and worn properly, you are conforming with 46-2-1309 and federal regulations.

Many Virginia Defense Force soldiers are deployed to the field or streets with load bearing vests (LBV) or equipment (LBE) with all of their needed rain gear, first aid kits, and required necessities. When working traffic control, the traffic vest should not be worn under the LBV or LBE. To do so takes away from the amount of visible and reflectorized material that could be seen by the motoring public. To wear something, even a belt over the top of the vest would lower its rating, and place the soldier out of compliance with federal regulations, providing for a possible defense should a driver claim she/he did not see the soldier directing traffic. Of course, during cold or rainy weather, the traffic vest must be worn over the field jacket, poncho, or parka. It must be the outer most garment worn. If the LBE or LBV needs to be taken off to accommodate this outermost wear, so be it. We must make every effort to ensure that drivers see and hear us as we direct their movements.

Whistle

There is nothing magic about a whistle, and for the most part, in this day and age when vehicles have air conditioning and CD players, most drivers will not even hear our required whistle blasts. BUT, use the whistle we must, because it is required by Virginia Code.

Most soldiers will find that a plastic referee type whistle attached to a breakaway lanyard will work best. Metal whistles have the tendency to sometimes freeze to your lips or tongue in extremely cold weather. The whistle must be capable of providing a sharp loud blast. Whistle work sometimes takes a bit of practice to get the different distinct number of blasts to come out clearly. Many folks new to directing traffic have found that practicing before a mirror, coordinating hand and arm movements with the whistle blasts, has helped with overcoming the awkwardness of the process.

Motorists will stop in the middle of the intersection and ask for directions, while both of our hands are holding traffic. Talking with a whistle in our mouth is sometimes difficult, and we won't want to drop the whistle. The whistle should be attached to a breakaway lanyard to keep from dropping it in a puddle, or having it damaged by a vehicle running over it. Some soldiers will run the lanyard through a button hole on the uniform, but it should not be placed around the neck unless there is a breakaway feature on the lanyard. A lanyard snagged by a passing motor vehicle can be hazardous even when it rips out the button hole, but one wrapped around our neck can be life changing.

Flashlight with Traffic Cone

Not all traffic direction is going to take place during the hours of daylight. Once the sun begins to fade, a flashlight with a traffic cone should be deployed. There are any number of configurations of both the flashlight and the cones. There are even traffic direction wands that offer strobe and blinking effects. The key here is to use the light device to enhance our visibility. Don't forget fresh and extra batteries and spare bulbs. It seems too, that many of the batteries sold today corrode more frequently. We may be well served to store the batteries in a couple of layers of plastic bags in our pouches, rather than in the flashlight itself. Once these batteries corrode, it often times permanently damages the flashlight.

Flares/Fusees

Flares or fusees are sometimes used to enhance the visibility of personnel working traffic control. They are usually used during the hours of darkness and especially if there is no ambient lighting such as street, parking, or store lighting. Post disaster traffic direction, when all the power is out, would be a typical time to deploy flares to give traffic control points more visibility. They are sometimes used during the daytime as well, to enhance notice of the traffic control point.

Flares should be used with caution. Flares use combustible materials that must be lighted using a striker that usually is part of the self-contained cap. Caution must be exercised when striking the flare with the cap. The end that is to be activated should be pointed away, and held away from the body. As the flare begins to burn, it produces sparks, extreme heat, and molten dripping material. All of these effects can cause severe burns. If activated during heavy rain, the falling water can hit the flare flame, and cause popping of hot molten material that can burn holes in footwear. Hold well away from your face and body.

Many flares have caps or anti rolling devices that prevent the flare from rolling. A flare that rolls into grass, trash, or other debris will create an additional problem at the traffic control point. Ensure that the flare is placed so that it will not roll. Use the attached anti roll device or place a couple of rocks or pile of gravel beside it to prevent the roll.

If there is a smell of natural gas in the area, it would be wise not to use flares. In the vicinity of a vehicle crash, there may be leaking gasoline or other flammable fluids. If such are detected, flares should not be used.

In addition to the fire hazard, flares put off noxious odor or fumes. Care should be taken when setting up a pattern of flares. In some instances, personnel may set up a ring of flares around the soldier directing traffic. While establishing a focal point for drivers, it may place the soldier in a position to breathe in fumes that may activate asthma or other respiratory ailments. We need to avoid being in such a location. Extra breaks should be scheduled for soldiers that for some reason are needed to work in such a flare pattern. Even when flares are spread out, the smoke and fumes are often carried toward the TCP.

Once the traffic assignment is completed, if flares have been deployed, the flare will need to be extinguished, especially if the traffic control point is demobilized and personnel intend to depart the area. Care should be taken when putting out the flare. If enough of the flare is still unburned, so that it can be picked up from the non-burning end, it can be picked up, lightly tapping the burning end on the pavement, causing the unburned material inside to fall out. As the material falls out, the flame will begin to go out. Once all flames are out, the flare can be left in the street. It is still hot and should not be placed in a trash container, thrown in a ditch, or placed in a vehicle.

Most flares have a burn time of between 15-30 minutes. If the traffic post is still manned but not active, and time allows, the flare could be left in place to burn out. It must not be left unattended.

Traffic Control Planning

Traffic control is more than the physical aspect of directing people where to go, it is also thinking and planning. When we are assigned to control traffic at some location, we begin to collect information on that location. What will be going on there? Will it be a parking area for spectators, vendors, or permanent residents? Are there parking passes or credentials to check? Are we just pointing people in a general direction or are we directing them into a particular spot. Are there special lanes or access for emergency vehicles or do we need to be ready to create such a lane. Is our TCP a major route for traffic, or an adjacent route that allows local residents to “escape” the event traffic? What are the parking regulations in and around our TCP? Who do we call for back up if needed? When we enter the intersection, which street is the major route and which is of a more minor use? Are there pedestrians that will need to be directed as well as motor vehicle traffic? Where do we fit into the overall scheme of the traffic control plan?

Traffic Control Point Size Up

When we arrive at the traffic control point (TCP) we need to do a size up of our area of operation. What are likely to be our “issues”? How are we going to handle them? If we are working a large four lane highway, our duties will be different than if we are handling a single T intersection. We will need more personnel and will likely have more traffic volume. We will likely fatigue more quickly on a busy complicated intersection.

Traffic at some intersections will normally be controlled by stop signs, yield signs, or the right of way rules in law. Some are controlled by traffic signals. Only in extreme cases should we ever enter the street at intersections where the traffic signals are still working. VDF soldiers attempting to direct traffic with or against the normal cycling of the signals will no doubt cause confusion. Upon approaching an intersection with working traffic signals, we need to call for public works or the police to place the lights on flash prior to entering the intersection.

Once we do a size up, we begin to prepare to enter the intersection or TCP. All of our equipment-vest, whistle, traffic cone and light, are readied and put into proper service.

Entering the Street

Remember that safety is the whole reason that we are assigned to a TCP. If we enter the street and become a casualty, we have failed at our job, and now someone else will need to straighten out the mess that we created. Always enter the street with caution. Even if there is an on-going emergency already occurring in the street, we need to ensure that we don't enter too hastily and make it worse.

For the most part, that emergency will not already exist, and we can take methodical approach to entering. We need to stand on the side of the road or corner and consider how we will take control of the intersection. We observe the traffic and watch for a safe gap in traffic. Many times when motorists see a uniformed, traffic vested person on the corner, they will begin to slow down with anticipation of our entering to take control. We must however remember that there are those who run yellow lights to avoid being caught by the red. Those types of folks will speed up when they see us to avoid having to wait. Use caution.

We may see a slower moving vehicle that has created a gap for our entry. Take advantage of that natural gap. What we don't want to do is just step right out in the lane of traffic without any warning. At the very least, someone will be surprised, slam on brakes and be really perturbed. At the most, we would have caused a rear end collision and more work for ourselves.

If no safe gap exists for our entry, we will have to create one. While standing on the side of the road or curb, we look at the closest oncoming vehicle on our side of the road, and while continuing to stand on the side of the road, we hold up our left hand as to notify the driver to stop the vehicle. We do this in a place of safety from the side of the road. We do not pick the vehicle that is already at a point of not being able to stop, but one that is perhaps a car back. We may have to wave the closest vehicle on past so as not to create a rear end collision. We need to look at the drivers that we direct. Make eye contact and then direct them in a fashion that clearly lets them know what we want them to do. We will point to the driver that we want to stop, getting her/his attention, and then display the stop signal.

Once we have created our own gap by getting one lane to stop, we begin to enter the street and work our way out into the roadway. We begin to turn our attention to the next lane. It may be traffic going in the same direction as the first lane we stopped on a multi-lane highway, or it may be the far side lane going in the opposite direction. As we enter the street, much of the traffic, if the drivers are paying attention, will begin to slow and stop. BUT, remember, some drivers are not always paying attention; some are conducting illegal activities such as texting; and some may be fatigued or intoxicated. Create that gap, move slowly, and methodically deeper into the traffic control point. There is no rush. It must be done safely, with our own, as well as the rest of the public's safety in mind.

After stopping all travel lanes, we can now begin our operation as we have planned. We should know which street will be given the most attention, or is carrying the most traffic. With a heavily traveled intersection, we should have plan or sequence that will govern our rotation of travel lanes. We must not forget, that we may have pedestrians that need to be controlled as well.

If at some point, and after a long tiring day in the street, we miss a lane of traffic in the rotation, and the horns begin to blow, it's no major deal. What we must not show is confusion or uncertainty. It may look like we made a mistake, but outwardly, we are still in control.

Confidence

Once we take control of the intersection we must continue to show confidence, stay calm, and act within our plan. Horns will blow, the public may yell, and suggest impossible things, but we are placed at the TCP to maintain control and safety. Confidence can be shown in our approach to the task. An upright stance, clear concise hand movements, clear blasts on the whistle all depict confidence. We may be rattled inside by a vehicle that just ran our stop signal, but we maintain our composure. Our stance and movements not only show that we are in control, it shows the public in a clear and concise way what they must do.

Hand and Arm Movements

The Virginia Code 46.2-1309 again gives us guidance in how we are to use our hand and arm movements to direct traffic. *“fingers extended and joined”* depicts authority and control. Hand movements should be crisp and done with authority. Hand movements with bent wrists, and waving fingers show unsureness and lack of confidence. Stopping movements with palms out and up, with arms at shoulder height, show confidence. When we wave vehicles through, we don't use just our fingers or fancy dance moves like we see on TV commercials, we use the concise knife edge movements indicative of a professional soldier. Pointing moves to indicate selection of a vehicle to move or turn is also done with precision.

Hand/Flashlight Movement

During the times of low light or darkness when we use a flashlight, we will have to change our movements just a bit to accommodate the use of the flashlight, but the deliberate precision must prevail. When using a flashlight and cone to stop a vehicle, the flashlight can be held horizontally in the stopping hand, and moved up and down to create a moving light. The opposite hand can be used show the stop signal if not already being used to hold traffic in the opposite direction, or the hand holding the flashlight can be held at a steady level to signal the stop. The moving flashlight catches the attention, and a steady hold signals the stop.

When using the flashlight to signal movement, such as straight through or turning, the flashlight is used as an extension of the hand. It is used with the same precise direction and movement across the chest as would the arm and hand without the flashlight.

Placement in the Intersection

We need to see and be seen when we are in the intersection. We need to see oncoming traffic, pedestrians attempting to cross the road, and anything else that may impact our operation. When we step out into the intersection we do so with caution and so that drivers can see our approach. We do so as well so that we can see the traffic that is closest to us, and for the moment the most dangerous. As we move father out into the roadway, we have to position ourselves so that we can see as much of the traffic environment as we can.

We should never get the idea that once we get into the intersection we can then just stay there in one place. Depending on the size of the intersection, we may have to move to avoid turning vehicles, or move to see and be visible to multiple lanes of traffic. In a four lane highway intersection that we may have to work by ourselves, we would have to stop the first two lanes, make sure the two stopped lanes understand that they need to remain stopped, move to a position where the next two lanes can see us, stop them, and then move again where we can activate the next movement. Of course, direction of traffic in this type of intersection by a single individual, is not the best situation, but it may happen from time to time, and extra caution must be exercised.

Night Operations

Hours of darkness bring forth even more caution for the TCP operator. Not only do drivers have more difficulty in seeing the soldier directing traffic, it presents visual difficulty for the soldier as well. We can be blinded by oncoming headlights. Spotlights from outside the TCP on store properties or signs can create shadows and hot spots that affect our ability to see clearly. Bright light and smoke from flares can create blind spots for the soldier and drivers. We need to stand and move so that we can see and be seen.

We need to allow for additional time and stopping distances for drivers during the hours of darkness. What we might take for granted in the daylight hours becomes lost at night. We can use flares, and flashlights with traffic cones during the darkness, but they are no guarantee that drivers will react the same as during daylight. In some cases, the event organizers may provide generator light packages to illuminate the TCP. Those lights may have to be repositioned after the hours of darkness if they are pointed in directions that blind the oncoming traffic or create shadows that make seeing the TCP more difficult.

Inclement Weather

Rain, fog, snow, cold, or hot weather all present challenges for the TCP operator. Rain, fog and snow present vision challenges. Falling weather on the windshields cause problems for drivers. Pedestrians are likely to be more impatient during such inclement times. Falling weather will create distractions for the soldier directing traffic as well. Rain dripping down our shirt collars, or running in our eyes will distract and hamper operations.

Any moisture on the pavement will make stopping more difficult, especially if done abruptly. We must take extra precautions to ensure that drivers are given adequate time to see our signals, and that we place ourselves in positions in the roadway that provide an avenue of escape if a driver does not stop in time.

Clear, sunny, hot and cold days also present some of the same distraction for both traffic and the soldier. Impatient pedestrians and drivers that are hot or cold will not react in the same way that folks react when they are comfortable. We will also be affected by cold or heat. Fatigue may set in more quickly. Anxiousness over being extremely cold, hypothermia or heat exhaustion will cause us to lose our focus on the task. We must guard against any lack of focus, and ensure that adequate relief is present.

Two or More Person TCP

On large more complicated intersections, more than one person may be needed to control the intersection safely. On those types of intersections, we need to place ourselves in the intersection in such a manner so as to allow for a balanced and logical approach. In a 4-way, 4-lane, north-south, east-west highway configuration, the two person traffic control team could position themselves as one, controlling the southbound and west bound lanes, and the other, controlling the eastbound and north bound lanes. Their positions would be diagonally across the intersection from one another. This approach would allow for each soldier to be closest to and in more direct sight of the lanes that each is controlling. In whatever configuration a team finds that works for them, someone needs to “call the shots.”

One person needs to be the lead person in designating when traffic is to flow and in which direction it will flow. Without a lead, both soldiers may decide that it's time for their traffic to flow. Where that particularly gets complicated and dangerous is when turning movements are allowed. Traffic must be coordinated. Verbal commands should always be used between the traffic direction team. Hand movements between VDF soldiers could be viewed and followed by pedestrians or drivers and be counterproductive.

Pedestrians

In addition to motor vehicular traffic at the TCP, in most community events there are likely to be many pedestrians. Pedestrians will come from many different directions. Some will try to cross the street correctly at the street corners near our TCP, and others will attempt to cross illegally far enough from us that we will not be able to control them. We must however be aware of their presence and the hazards that they present to our safe direction of traffic. A large group of pedestrians walking or crossing the street 30 yards down range from us will create a tie up in our intersection as traffic slows or stops to avoid them. We can stop traffic flow at our intersection, to prevent clogging up the road until the pedestrians clear, and allow traffic to flow in another direction. Many pedestrians will wait patiently on the corner if told that we will get them across soon. Many will not, and will take the road in their own hands. We can use hand commands for stopping pedestrians, but need to use verbal commands to release them for crossing.

Many of our community support missions involve event venues that serve alcoholic beverages. While most vendors ensure that they do not violate Virginia law by serving intoxicated patrons, some event goers arrive or leave intoxicated. They may not hear or want to hear and follow our directions whether driving or walking. We must be ready for their out of the ordinary actions and reactions, especially when they are standing on the corner waiting to cross the street. They may stumble and fall into our intersection, or cross when not directed.

Handicapped individuals may take longer to cross the street than other folks. Their assistance devices may or may not work well along curbs and streets without ramps. They may have to travel a short distance away from the corner or crossing in order to get back up onto a side walk because of their particular handicap. We need to be ready to hold traffic for additional time or accommodate the additional steps necessary to get them across safely.

Young children often dart out from the side of the street when they drop something or see some shiny object that catches their eye. When crossing, they often run ahead of parents or take short cuts.

All traffic needs to be stopped when we are crossing pedestrians. This allows for the often erratic behavior described above. It ensures that even with erratic behavior, there is no moving traffic.

Grid Locking Intersections

In large events, there are often too many cars for too little concrete. Even with the best traffic control in the vicinity of the event, traffic eventually gets to a location where the traffic is being controlled by the regular traffic control devices such as stop signs and lights. In some cases this will have a domino effect all the way back to our intersection.

What we need to avoid is the grid locking of our intersection. For example, if we have an east/west, north/south intersection and we allow our northbound traffic to stop in our intersection because the north bound lane is stopped 2 miles up the road, now we can't even run east and west bound traffic because we have cars stopped blocking the east/west lanes. Not only do we limit our ability to run the east/west traffic, we limit our ability to get an emergency vehicle into the area if needed. To ensure that the intersection is not grid locked, we need to look for natural breaks in the traffic flow to stop clear of the intersection. Watching and anticipating the backup will allow us to stop the flow in the backed up direction before it stops. We may also have to divert a couple of cars in order to clear the grid lock. We will need to work with our adjoining TCPs to give major run time to the road when they are sending vehicles in our direction, and running cross traffic when the other TCPs are running theirs.

Summary

Traffic control is an important aspect of Virginia Defense Force capabilities. It places us as individuals in an extremely visible position to represent well the agency, or to cause criticism. In addition it is a dangerous operation. To engage in traffic direction we must be prepared psychologically, physically, legally, and with all skill and equipment required. To engage in it without proper training and preparation invites disaster.

Proper authority is authorized by Virginia law. It sets the standards by which we must work. It sets out the proper form and equipment with which we must work. And, through it our training and preparation are guided.