

Case 9 | Issue 38 – Roads policing

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THE LESSONS**✉ learning@policeconduct.gov.uk🌐 www.policeconduct.gov.uk/learning-the-lessons**Police vehicle aquaplanes while responding to an incident***Police car spins out of control and collides with another vehicle, raising issues about:*

- *Taking account of road conditions*
- *Force policy on speed restrictions*

This case is relevant to the following areas:

Roads policing**Overview of incident**

At around 11.25am police received a 999 call regarding a man refusing to leave a job centre and being abusive to staff. The control room graded the call as “immediate”. PC A and PC B were dispatched to the incident. They were re-assigned from another incident approximately 18 miles away. PC A and PC B were in a marked police vehicle driven by PC A. PC A was a standard response trained driver.

At around the same time, PC C and PC D were also assigned to the incident. They arrived approximately two minutes later. PC A and PC B stated they would continue responding to the incident until cancelled. A few minutes later PC A and PC B requested an update over the radio. PC C and PC D were asked whether they required another unit. They said everything was ok but to keep the other unit “floating for now”. PC A and PC B were asked to keep making their way to the incident.

PC C said the man at the job centre became uncompliant so they asked for another unit to assist. PC C and PC D arrested the man. Soon after the request for another unit to assist, another call was circulated on the airwaves for officers to attend to support PC C and PC D. PC C and PC D were told PC A and PC B were still on their way.

Shortly after, PC C and PC D requested for officers with a van to attend the job centre. PC E was assigned and PS F arrived at around the same time. A number of others responded about bringing a van and PC E was cancelled. A minute after PS F arrived at the scene, a further officer was dispatched and a further officer arrived at the scene. The force did not have a specific policy which set out rules or considerations for the number of vehicles to dispatch to an incident.

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Around this time, the Incident Data Recorder (IDR) in the marked police vehicle being driven by PC A showed the vehicle as being driven at approximately 85mph. Force policy stated standard response drivers were subject to a maximum of plus 20mph above posted speed restrictions, if safe. The speed limit on the road was 60mph. The car soon reached its fastest speed (97mph) 600 metres and approximately 15 seconds before the collision. Shortly after, the police vehicle lost its normal grip on the road after going through some standing water, spinning along the road for 25m before colliding with two vehicles.

Mr G, a collision investigator, explained the factors which influence the conditions under which aquaplaning occurs. These included surface water depth, tyre aspect ratio and pressure, vehicular load, and vehicle speed. He explained vehicles need to travel at speeds above 50mph for aquaplaning to occur, although there are variables which can impact this. He also stated it would be unreasonable to expect drivers to know exactly what speeds result in aquaplaning, but generally, the lower the speed the less chance of aquaplaning. In terms of the conditions on the road, Mr G said PC A would have encountered other water on the road that day given the weather. Mr G said it is likely PC A would have experienced problems even if his speed was as low as 60mph.

PC C and PC D were reassigned from the call at the job centre and drove to the scene of the collision. They gave medical attention to PC A and PC B. PC A and PC B were trapped in their vehicle and were removed by the emergency services. They had life threatening injuries and were taken to hospital. None of the three people injured in the collision remembered the collision.

While carrying out the investigation, the IOPC uncovered issues with the force's telematics system. This directly affected the validity of the data collected and as such brought the system into disrepute. Further analysis of the system highlighted issues with software updates and internal processes for data validation and initial configuration.

As a result, internal processes were put in place by the fleet department to address configuration and calibration issues. A schedule was also introduced to regularly undertake system health checks and record and track remedial work. The supplier developed a new process to make sure all devices operated on the latest version of their software and updated all devices accordingly. The force is now replacing its telematics system/provider, along with the lessons learned that came to light during this investigation.

Type of investigation

IOPC independent investigation.

Outcomes for officers and staff

PC A

1. PC A had a case to answer for gross misconduct. This was in respect of the allegations he failed to consider the prevailing road conditions and failed to apply force guidelines over speed restrictions which reduced the opportunity to react to changing road conditions. He attended a hearing and received management advice.

Questions to consider

Questions for policy makers and managers

1. How does your force make sure officers are aware of policy and guidance on speed restrictions?
2. What guidance does your force give around deployment and cancellation decisions where significant distances for travel are involved?

Questions for police officers and police staff

3. How would the conditions on the road affect your decision making and manner of driving?