

Use of County-Owned Vehicles

Objective:	To establish procedures governing the use and maintenance of County-owned or leased vehicles.	Policy/Procedure Number:	01-28
Reference: (All Applicable Federal, State and Local Laws)	Agreements with Collective Bargaining Units; Tompkins County Administrative Policy 09-44; Tompkins County Administrative Policy 10-22	Effective Date:	January 12, 1981
Legislative Policy Statement:	<p>County-owned vehicles must be used for official County business only. Personal uses of County-owned vehicles are expressly prohibited, except for authorized commuting and de minimis personal use. This policy applies to all Tompkins County employees and elected officials.</p> <p>County employees or officials authorized to use a County-owned vehicle (designated driver) shall observe all local and state laws pertaining to the operation of the motor vehicle. Any fines imposed for any violation incurred by the designated driver shall be the responsibility of the designated driver.</p>	Responsible Department:	County Administration
		Modified Date (s):	November 5, 2003; February 3, 2004; November 6, 2012; March 2019
		Resolution No.:	2012-228; 225-2003; 228-2004; 2019-54
		Next Scheduled Review:	March 2024
General Information:	The County is self-insured for automobile accidents, which could require taxpayers to pay significant sums in the event of injuries to passengers, drivers, or property damage. The County endeavors to reduce this risk of liability by limiting unnecessary use of County vehicles.		
I. Definitions:	<p>Self-insurance - A risk management method in which a calculated amount of money is set aside by the County to compensate for potential loss</p> <p>Vehicles - Any motorized means of transportation used in the course of performing County business, owned or leased.</p> <p>Designated Driver – A County employee or official who has a valid driver's license and is authorized by a Department Head or Deputy to operate a County-owned vehicle</p> <p>De Minimis - Lacking significance or importance; so minor as to merit disregard</p> <p>Hands-free - The use of a wireless communications device with a speaker phone, headset or earpiece.</p>		
II. Policy:	<p>A. Only Tompkins County employees on official County business and as authorized by the department head or the County Administrator may drive or operate County-owned vehicles. Authorized drivers must have a valid driver's license.</p> <p>B. Department heads are responsible for assigning and authorizing use of vehicles within their departments.</p> <p>C. Official County business includes giving rides to other department staff or clients only as needed to fulfill the driver's work duties. In addition, County employees may provide rides to County employees from other departments, employees or elected officials from other municipalities, or to members of County-appointed advisory boards when (1) attending work-related conferences or meetings, and (2) when the transportation of those additional County or municipal employees as passengers is authorized by the Department Head. County employees may also provide rides to contractors and consultants for work related to a contract with the County.</p>		

- D. When a County employee is using a vehicle shared among multiple departments and wishes to transport passengers who are not employees of either department, the employee who is designated as the driver must obtain permission from the Department Head responsible for custody and operation of the vehicle. Supervisors and Department Heads are not authorized to permit transport of passengers except as explicitly stated herein.
- E. Personal use of a County-owned vehicle is expressly prohibited, except for authorized commuting and *de minimis* personal use. *De minimis* personal use may include stopping for lunch between business stops or stopping for an errand (less than 15 minutes in duration) on an authorized commute. Any stop for lunch must be within three (3) miles of the route between stops and any stop for a personal errand must be within three (3) miles of the route reasonably taken for the authorized commute. In no event shall the transportation of unauthorized passengers be considered a *de minimis* use.

Policy Exception

This policy shall not apply to the use of Sheriff's Office vehicles or the use of Department of Emergency Response vehicles. These Departments have established policies with regard to vehicle usage and additional policies with regard to maintenance that are specific to law enforcement and emergency operations.

III. Procedure:

A. General Vehicle Use

1. If purchasing, gasoline must be purchased from the distributor currently holding an agreement with the County, when practical. Check with Purchasing to determine the current vendor.
2. In appropriate circumstances, as an alternative to using a County-owned vehicle County Department Heads could consider the option of renting a car and obtaining insurance deemed appropriate by the Department of County Administration.
3. Ensure unattended vehicles, along with any canopies, toolboxes, etc., are locked and that items in open pickup truck beds have been secured from ejection and/or theft.
4. Do not smoke or allow passengers to smoke in County-owned or leased vehicles (Refer to Policy 01-23).
5. When returning a vehicle to the appropriate department fleet, the vehicle log shall be completely filled out including date, destination, ending odometer reading, etc.

B. Driver Safety

1. All occupants of County vehicles equipped with seat belts must use the seat belts at all times when riding in the vehicle. The County employee designated as a driver is responsible for ensuring this procedure is followed.
2. The authorized driver must operate the vehicle in a manner consistent with its intended use and in a safe manner conforming to traffic laws and road conditions.

3. All designated drivers are responsible for reporting changes in driving privileges, traffic infractions or criminal traffic offenses charged while operating a County vehicle or a privately owned vehicle on County business or off duty hours to their Department Head immediately. Failure to notify may result in disciplinary actions, up to and including termination.
4. Drivers must remain attentive at all time. Drivers are prohibited from eating, reading, writing or sending an electronic message, computer entry and from holding a wireless communications device to the ear while driving a County vehicle unless action is exempt below. Using hands-free mode is acceptable.

Exceptions to restrictions include:

- Reporting illegal activity
 - Summoning medical aid or emergency assistance
 - Preventing injury to a person or property
5. When a County vehicle is observed to be in a dangerous or defective condition, the driver is responsible for reporting an unsafe vehicle to their Department Head as soon as possible.

If the vehicle becomes disabled at time of operation, the driver should immediately pull to the side of the road onto a well-lit area or other identified safe location with hazard lights and contact their Department Head for instruction on vehicle towing.

6. Operating a County vehicle while under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs or while under the influence of legal drugs which impair judgement or motor skills is prohibited and will result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.
7. An authorized driver shall operate a County vehicle in accordance with any license requirements or restrictions, such as corrective lenses, daytime only, etc.

C. Management Responsibility

Department Heads having custody of a County-owned vehicle must adhere to the following:

1. Maintenance

- Ensure that the vehicle is in compliance with manufacturer recommended maintenance schedules.
- Ensure that all vehicle inspections, maintenance and repair records are maintained and available upon request.

2. Decals and Stickers

- Ensure that the vehicle has County decals on it at all times and that County decals are removed before the vehicle is sold or traded in.
- Ensure that the vehicle does not carry bumper stickers other than necessary parking stickers or other County authorized stickers.

3. *Titles*

- Ensure that vehicle titles are delivered to the Risk Manager, with a copy maintained by the department.
- Departments must advise the Risk Manager when they purchase or dispose of a vehicle.

4. *Accidents*

- Ensure that reports of all accidents involving County vehicles be submitted to the County's Risk Manager as soon as possible (see Policy 10-22).
- Strongly encourage authorized drivers to take a NYS Defensive Driving Course or Motor Vehicle Accident Prevention Course.

5. *Employee Status Change*

- It is the responsibility of Department Heads and/or Supervisors to notify the County Risk Manager and the Human Resources Commissioner immediately when made aware of an employee's change in licensure status, traffic infractions or criminal traffic offenses charged while operating a County vehicle or a privately owned vehicle on County business or off duty hours when said employee is a designated driver, or where possession of a valid driver's license is a job requirement.