



Carrboro Police Department



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I. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

It is the policy of the Carrboro Police Department to answer all calls for service in a professional and courteous manner. Officers should be aware that some reports may be the result of biases, misperceptions, and the subjective opinion(s) of a reporting party. On the other hand, such reports by concerned citizens frequently assist in the prevention of crime and other threats to public safety. While we recognize the need to investigate such calls, we should be mindful of various options we have in doing so. It is the intent of this policy to help officers make an informed decision on how best to handle these types of calls.

II. DEFINITION

Suspicious Activity: Observable, specific behavior that would lead a reasonable person to believe that someone is engaged in, or attempting to engage in, criminal activity.

III. CALLS FOR SERVICE

When responding to a call of a suspicious person(s), condition, or activity (like drug use, sales, etc.), officers must be mindful of the activity that a reporting party is claiming to be suspicious.

Responding officers should ask telecommunicators to describe the **specific behavior** that the caller claims is suspicious. Examples of suspicious activity include but are not limited to; looking into parked vehicles, pulling on door handles, or other behaviors that, when combined with an officer's training and experience, would indicate a level of reasonable suspicion to a police officer. Race, gender and/or presence in an area that the general public can access *alone* does **not** meet the definition of suspicious activity.

IV. GUIDELINES

Officers will start from an assumption of innocence when initiating an investigation into suspicious activity. Moreover, officers should be mindful that anonymous and other callers may provide mistaken, exaggerated, or false accusations of criminal conduct. Therefore, officers must not conduct an investigative stop without first determining that



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reasonable suspicion exists.

Reasonable suspicion is an objective reasonable belief that criminal activity is afoot; however, it is less than probable cause. Officers will never conduct an investigative stop based on a mere hunch, or generalized suspicion.

Accordingly, officers should keep the following guidelines in mind as they respond to suspicious person calls.

- A. The officer must first consider whether the reporting party has sufficiently described the observable behavior that they believe is suspicious.
- B. The officer should assess whether the information provided by the caller establishes reasonable suspicion to believe the described person is involved in criminal activity.
 - 1. Reasonable suspicion must be based on articulable facts and circumstances, as well as reasonable inferences, in light of an officer's training and experiences.
 - 2. Relevant facts may include information relayed by a reporting party, if sufficiently reliable.
 - 3. An anonymous reporter, standing alone, rarely provides reasonable suspicion for a stop.
 - a. Since an anonymous person is unable to be held accountable for their statements, such a report generally fails to meet minimal trustworthiness standards.
 - b. An unidentified reporting party can provide false or fabricated information with impunity, in an attempt to have another person stopped without adequate justification.
 - c. Since anonymous and unaccountable callers generally fail to provide adequate information to establish reasonable suspicion, officers must adequately corroborate the party's report of criminal activity, as described below (section C), before making a stop.



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4. If the report is provided by an identified and accountable party, the information may be sufficient to affect a stop.
 - a. A reporting party who identifies himself or herself is generally more reliable than an anonymous caller, as an identified person can be held accountable for the truth of their statements.
 - b. However, as this is not always the case, officers must conduct a careful, case-by-case assessment of all the information including the caller's report and should make an independent assessment as to whether reasonable suspicion exists to conduct a stop.
 - c. Oftentimes, even an identified caller fails to provide adequate information to establish reasonable suspicion. In such event, officers must sufficiently corroborate the party's report of criminal activity, as described below, before making a stop.

C. Corroboration

1. Information provided by an unreliable, or unaccountable caller, may establish reasonable suspicion, either standing alone, or in combination with additional factors of which the officer is, or becomes, aware, if sufficiently corroborated.
2. Corroboration may validate the reporting party's reliability; in such case, the party's statement, combined with the officer's corroboration and other factors, may provide reasonable suspicion for the stop.
3. Officers must corroborate allegations of criminal activity (not mere identification) provided by the caller.
4. Prior to effecting a stop, the officer must have at least reasonable suspicion to believe criminal activity is afoot, taking into account all the circumstance, including reliable information provided by the reporting party.
5. If the information provided by the reporting party fails to provide reasonable suspicion that criminal activity is afoot, as described above, then the responding officer will not make an investigatory stop of anyone involved.



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- D. When an officer lacks authority to stop, the following options may be considered when responding to a suspicious person or suspicion circumstance call:
1. Contact the original caller directly and try to get additional information.
 2. Clear the call as unfounded.
 3. Respond to the general area of the call, observe the area, and provide visibility and presence.
 4. Engage in a voluntary consensual conversation with members of the community who may be willing to provide information. Officers must be mindful of their responsibility to make sure the person to whom they are interacting feels free to leave the area and/or not respond to questions.