Section 201 is a companion document to AOM Sections 505.00 and 506.00. Code 3 driving is a privilege necessary for emergency responders and codified in California Vehicle Code (CVC) section 21055. It is for emergency situations where life and/or property are directly endangered (or reasonably believed to be). Its use alone places the responding units and the public at a higher risk of becoming involved in a vehicle accident. At the very least code 3 driving is an inconvenience to normal traffic patterns and flow. Because of this we must be good stewards of this privilege. With having this legal ability comes a larger responsibility.

We have the responsibility to drive accounting for changing weather conditions, road surface types and conditions, traffic, our personal condition and the condition of the apparatus we are operating. The main take away from CVC 21055 is that you are to drive with due regard for safety. Due regard for safety is not a static concept. How it is applied constantly changes. It is up to you to adjust your driving depending on the various conditions that are encountered.

Day to day, code 3 responses are amongst the most dangerous operations we perform. The decision to respond Code 3 rests with the Captain using the Quality of Life Standards identified in AOM 506.00 and all available call information. This information can change while en route and must be factored into the response level. Whenever there is a question whether to respond Code 3, err in favor or a code 3 response.

Code 3 is the immediate response to a call for emergency assistance utilizing warning lights and sirens.

The following guidelines shall be observed when driving Code 3:

— After arrival, the first in Officer shall be responsible for determining the response status for the balance of the assignment.

— Apparatus shall not be driven at a speed greater than can be maintained with safety. Operators must realize that direct responsibility for the safety of the crew and apparatus rests with them. The ultimate responsibility for a safe response rests with the officer in charge of the apparatus.

— When in the operator's best judgment it becomes necessary to cross over and drive against oncoming traffic, speed shall not exceed that which can be maintained with safety.

— When responding to an emergency, no apparatus, with the exception of Chief Officer after making radio contact shall overtake or pass another apparatus, unless one is disabled or delayed. Once on scene the movement of apparatus around each other must be done only after making radio contact.

— Most Code 3 accidents occur at intersections, the most dangerous points along any response route, even those where the emergency apparatus has the right-
of-way.

— At intersections where the Code 3 apparatus is requesting the right-of-way against a traffic controlling device (e.g., red light, stop or yield sign, etc.), the driver of the apparatus should take into account the circumstances of the intersection in determining the speed of the apparatus when traversing the intersection.

— Some intersections may require that apparatus come to a complete stop every time prior to proceeding. These intersections usually do not allow the driver enough visibility to clear the intersection due to buildings or other obstacles. Other intersections allow you to enter the intersection slowly without stopping. These are intersections that have good visibility in all directions on approach. Inclement weather, peak traffic cycles, poor road quality, blind sight lanes, etc., are some of the conditions that may demand the extra margin of safety provided by coming to a complete intersection stop.

— If multiple apparatus proceed to an emergency together, care shall be taken for all apparatus to proceed through the intersection in caravan fashion to avoid confusion to the public. The lead unit must drive at a speed that allows the trailing units to stay caravanned.

— The use of emergency warning devices at blocked intersections must be prudent and with due consideration for all road and traffic conditions. Particular care must be taken to minimize the possibility of causing civilian drivers to move into hazardous situations in order to create a path for emergency vehicle passage. Shutting your siren off and waiting patiently until the light changes may be the best decision.

— When a response is unexpectedly delayed for instance by a train, the crew must notify dispatch and other responding units of their situation.

— Passing on the right when responding Code 3 should only be done when in the driver’s judgment it is the best path of travel and, if necessary, shall be done at a speed that takes into account the possibility that a vehicle may pull to the right and create a hazard.

— When freeways are used as a response route to an emergency call, the existing traffic conditions must be evaluated to determine the safest and most appropriate use of warning devices for those specific circumstances. If the Company Officer and/or operator elect to travel Code 2, even if responding to an emergency call, it must be remembered that the apparatus no longer has exempt status under the California Vehicle Code. As a result, all traffic laws
(speed limits, right-of-way rules, traffic signs, etc.) must be followed.

— When using the freeway to respond to an emergency call, code 2 is recommended until the unit enters the off ramp. Consideration must be given to the fact that the speed of freeway traffic dramatically increases stopping distances and decreases the amount of time available to react defensively. Civilian vehicle vehicles have to be closer to emergency apparatus to hear sirens. The use of lights and sirens while responding at freeway speeds is usually more dangerous due to the unpredictable civilian reactions at those speeds.

— When responding to a call on the freeway, code lights and limited siren use is indicated as the unit approaches the scene and maneuvers to gain a position of advantage. The traffic conditions will affect the need for the use of sirens and lights.

— When E.F.D. crews are working freeway incidents, fire apparatus shall be positioned to afford the greatest amount of physical protection for those firefighters without becoming a hazard itself.

— Because flashing lights tend to attract drunk drivers, particularly at night, the California Highway Patrol recommends reducing the number of such lights to the minimum required for safety when stopped on freeway shoulders.

— It shall be Escondido Fire Department Policy that when stopped and working a freeway incident, the number of warning lights may be reduced only if the apparatus is completely out of traffic lanes and the officer determines it is safe to do so.

— When an Engine and Ambulance are responding from the same quarters, the Engine will lead unless directed by the Captain otherwise.

— When responding to a fire alarm all units will respond code 2 except the first in engine, unless responding from the same quarters where a code 3 caravan response is authorized.

Remember that it is our responsibility to drive Code 3 in a manner that ensures we will arrive at our destination ready to render aid, and that we have not endangered the public or ourselves while in transit.

**Code 2 (Respond without Delay)**

Code 2 is the response to a call for service or assistance without delay. The use of emergency lights and/or the siren is not part of a code 2 response. A driver will operate his vehicle in accordance with the vehicular laws at all times while responding Code 2.
**Opticom**

The Opticom is a device, which allows an emergency vehicle to "capture" a traffic light, thereby assuring a green light for itself and a red light for all other directions of travel at the intersection. The Opticom consists of three basic parts: an emitter mounted on the emergency vehicle, a detector mounted on the traffic signal, and a phase selector mounted inside the signal control cabinet.

The **emitter**, mounted on the emergency vehicle, consists of a driver-operated switch and a stroboscopic light, which is mounted on the roof of the vehicle. The strobe light is bright enough to serve as an augmentation to the vehicle's existing warning lights, readily attracting the attention of oncoming traffic, even in daylight. On our vehicles the switch is wired in series with the vehicle master switch. A solenoid is connected to the air actuated parking brake which cancels operation of the Opticom when the parking brake is set, even when the master switch is on and all emergency lights are on. There is also an activation button on some apparatus that when held in or down manually overrides the system and operates the Opticom without the emergency lights or master switch.

The **detector** mounted on the traffic signal itself, acts as a sensor. It recognizes an approaching emergency vehicle, equipped with an Opticom, and activates the phase selector. The detector's sensitivity can be adjusted, thereby allowing for some variation in reaction distance. In Escondido, the detectors are set at infinity. This creates a "line of sight" situation - if you can see a traffic signal, your Opticom can capture it. Curves in the road and other obstructions will greatly reduce the detector's reaction time.

The **phase selector** is located inside the cabinet and is connected to the controller, which operates the signal under normal conditions. When an emergency vehicle approaches the intersection, the controller turns all the lights amber and then red, except in the direction of travel of the emergency vehicle. This light is turned green and remains green until the emergency vehicle passes through the intersection.

Some safety tips for Opticom operation:

- The Opticom operates on a first come, first served basis. If an Opticom signal does not work, be aware of the possibility of another emergency vehicle approaching from a different direction.

- The Opticom will not operate at an intersection when a pedestrian crosswalk button has been activated.

- The Opticom is not recommended for use during a heavy rainstorm, especially at night. The strobe light will have the visual effect of "freezing" the rain drops in front of the windshield.
NOTE: It is the policy of the E.F.D. NOT to use the Opticom in Code 2 situations, with the following exceptions:

— When the paramedics are transporting a patient Code 2, who would normally be transported Code 3, but whose medical condition could be jeopardized by the red lights, siren and air horn.

— When responding to an emergency requiring Code 3 response, when the normal warning devices are not functioning properly, and after notifying dispatch. The driver must weigh whether the call justifies sending an additional unit with functioning emergency lights if it will provide for a safer more expedient response. Using Opticom often causes confusion on the part of nearby drivers. Some drivers will move to the side as if the unit was using code lights and others will not.

**Warning Devices and Other Safety Factors**

While responding code 3 there are times when the use of the siren can be limited. Examples of possible times when siren use can be limited are middle of the night responses through neighborhoods, around schools and hospitals, and long stretches of straight road with good visibility. The Captain and Engineer must know that the siren can and must be used anytime deemed appropriate for potential hazards. When the siren is not on, driving will need to be adjusted to ensure a safe response. Considerate use of the siren can be a customer service issue but the safety of the response must be the priority.

To guard against accidents when responding to alarms, sirens and air horns must be sounded as reasonably necessary. Company Officers and drivers must be especially careful during cold or rainy weather, as car windows are usually rolled up tight during these times, which makes it very difficult for other drivers to hear the approach of emergency vehicles. Many distractions including cell phone use can interfere with a driver hearing an emergency apparatus driving code 3.

Generally, warning devices should not be sounded, when consistent with safety, in the immediate vicinity of hospitals, schools, theaters, churches, or other places of assembly during the time that people are, or are likely to be, in attendance.

The red lights and headlights on all emergency equipment should be kept on at all hours of the day or night while responding code 3 to emergency calls with some possible exceptions mentioned above. At all times headlights should be on while driving. When any apparatus is parked in an oncoming traffic lane at night, the headlights should be off so as not to blind drivers. Setting the parking brake will deactivate the Opticom so the traffic lights can cycle. The master switch can also be
used to turn the Opticom off as well.

All fire department vehicles double-parked on the street at night should have all red lights (front and rear), and directional signals turned on as a warning of their presence to approaching traffic. When a series of department vehicles is double-parked in close proximity to each other, it should be necessary for only the first and last vehicles to keep their warning lights on. Such double-parked vehicles should be moved to a safer position as soon as conditions permit. The Captain should consider calling for traffic control from Dispatch.

**Crossing Controlled Intersections**

Fire department vehicles must be prepared to come to a stop when a red light is encountered at an intersection. All drivers and pedestrians proceeding on the green light must realize that the fire department vehicle is signaling for the right-of-way and all traffic has stopped to let the department vehicle proceed through the intersection. Upon approaching a stop sign, a fire department vehicle must not proceed until all other vehicles yield the right-of-way. If opposing traffic does not yield to the siren and red lights, the right-of-way must not be taken arbitrarily.

**One-Way Streets**

Whether to respond against traffic on one-way streets is a decision left to the judgment of the officer and driver of the vehicle. Conditions are too variable to set hard and fast rules. Normally, a response distance longer than half a city block on a one-way street should receive special consideration of the time of day, traffic conditions, type of emergency, and the like. Traveling against traffic on a one-way street should in all cases be practiced only as a last resort. Obviously, extreme caution must be exercised, and any extended travel should be avoided whenever possible.