



**PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MARYLAND
FIRE/EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT GENERAL ORDER**

General Order Number: 13-02	Effective Date: August 23, 2019
Division: Public Affairs	
Chapter: Ride-Along Observer Program	
By Order of the Fire Chief: Benjamin M. Barksdale	Issue Date: August 20, 2019

BB

POLICY

The Ride-Along Observer Program is an invaluable career and volunteer recruitment and public relations tool. This policy identifies the procedures and responsibilities for persons wishing to participate in the Ride-Along Observer Program and to ensure the safety and success of all of those persons involved in the program, including the Observer, Volunteer Corporation and Prince George's County.

This General Order does not apply to those persons who are participating in Emergency Medical Services (EMS) internship programs that are governed by contractual agreements.

DEFINITIONS

Observer – A person who is not a career or volunteer member of the Prince George's County Fire/Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Department. This definition specifically includes members of Fire/EMS departments outside of Prince George's County.

Immediately Dangerous to Life or Health (IDLH) – An atmosphere that poses an immediate threat to life, would cause irreversible adverse health effects, or would impair an individual's ability to escape from a dangerous atmosphere.

PROCEDURES / RESPONSIBILITIES

I. General Provisions

- A. Observers shall be at least 16 years of age. This information is verified by obtaining a copy of the person's driver's license or other government issued picture identification card. For persons less than 18 years of age, a parent or guardian must sign the application form.
- B. Persons wishing to participate in the Ride-Along Observer Program must schedule their ride-along a minimum of 72 hours in advance. This allows sufficient time for an initial background screening prior to participating in the ride-along program. However, on rare occasions, this process could be delayed due to extenuating circumstances.
- C. All observers must review the rules governing this policy, complete a Ride-Along Observer Program Application and sign a General Release. The application and general release are then submitted to the respective station where the observer will ride.



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- D. Observers will be limited to four (4) opportunities per year. Each opportunity cannot exceed 72 hours.
- E. Requests for special exceptions must be submitted in writing to the Deputy Fire Chief for Emergency Services or the Fire Chief for consideration, and must include a specific timeframe.
- F. No more than two (2) observers may participate at a given station at the same time. In addition, only one (1) observer may ride a single piece of apparatus at a time.
- G. Observers must wear clothing that is appropriate for the weather. No shorts or other clothing that may discredit the fire service is allowed.
- H. Observers must wear an orange helmet and/or a safety vest, clearly marked with "OBSERVER." **No other structural firefighting PPE will be worn.**
- I. Observers shall remain under the control of the unit officer-in-charge at all times. Failure to follow directions of the unit officer-in-charge will be documented and result in the removal of privileges to participate in the Ride-Along Observer Program.
 - 1. Observers shall not engage in operations and shall not count towards minimum staffing levels.
 - 2. Observers shall remain outside the perimeter of the operational area of the incident scene. Observers shall stay outside and away from the building on fire incidents, and remain a safe distance away from accident vehicles on a rescue incident.
 - 3. Under no circumstances shall an observer be permitted to enter into an Immediate Danger to Life or Health (IDLH) atmosphere or a building that has been involved in a fire until the Incident Commander has determined the incident is under control, the IDLH atmosphere cleared, and the structure determined to be safe for entry by non-operational personnel. The assigned unit officer-in-charge, Division/Group Supervisor or designated Command Officer must escort the observer.
- J. Once an observer submits an application to be a member of the Department, they can no longer participate as an observer.
- K. The Department/Volunteer Corporation reserves the right to end a scheduled ride-along at any time.



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II. Tracking and Monitoring

- A. Upon completion of the Ride-Along Observer Program Application and General Release Form, the forms and a copy of the person's driver's license/government-issued identification card must be submitted to the respective Volunteer Chief or Battalion Chief for review and approval. These completed forms must include the signature of a parent or guardian if the observer applicant is less than 18 years of age. Once the forms have been approved by the Volunteer Chief or Battalion Chief, the completed forms, along with a copy of the driver's license/photo identification card, are sent to the Watch Office via email at WatchOffice@co.pg.md.us. The email subject line must include "Ride-Along Observer Application and the individual's name;" (EXAMPLE: **Ride-Along Observer Application – John Smith**). The Watch Office shall acknowledge receipt of the email, track and monitor approvals. The Watch Office will forward a copy of the completed form and driver's license/photo identification card via email to the Office of the Fire Marshal for the initial background check.
- B. The Office of the Fire Marshal shall perform an initial background check on the person requesting to participate in the Ride-Along Observer Program. This initial background check will be good for a six (6) month period.
- C. The Office of the Fire Marshal will notify the Watch Office of the background check results (approved or denied) via email. The Watch Office will immediately notify the respective Volunteer Chief or Battalion Chief via email of the results (approved or denied). It is the responsibility of the respective Volunteer Chief/Battalion Chief requesting approval of the ride-along to monitor emails for this approval or denial.
- D. If the request is denied, the respective Volunteer Chief/Battalion Chief will notify the observer applicant and the scheduled ride-along is canceled.
- E. If the request is approved, the respective Volunteer Chief/Battalion Chief will be notified. The Volunteer Chief/Battalion Chief will notify the observer applicant that the ride-along can occur as scheduled. The Watch Office will post the scheduled ride-along on the Master Calendar.
- F. The Watch Office shall maintain a database to track the individual's participation in the Ride-Along Observer Program.
- G. The Watch Office shall maintain a file of all applications to participate in the Ride-Along Observer Program.
- H. Once the Fire Commission Office has received an application for membership from an individual, they will contact the Watch Office via email to make sure that the individual is no longer eligible to participate in the Ride-Along Observer Program.



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III. Compliance

- A. The Volunteer Chief will be responsible to ensure that the observer follows all established rules associated with the Ride-Along Observer Program.
- B. Stations that violate this General Order shall not be permitted to participate in this program for a period of time as specified by the Fire Chief and may result in disciplinary action.

REFERENCES

N/A

FORMS / ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Ride-Along Observer Program Application Form and General Release



PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MARYLAND
FIRE/EMS DEPARTMENT



RIDE-ALONG OBSERVER PROGRAM APPLICATION

FULL NAME:			
ETHNICITY:		DOB:	
ADDRESS:			
NAME OF SCHOOL OR EMPLOYER:			
HOME PHONE:		CELL PHONE:	
EMAIL:			
EMERGENCY CONTACT:			
HAVE YOU EVER PARTICIPATED IN THE RIDE-ALONG OBSERVER PROGRAM BEFORE? YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>			
IF SO, AT WHAT STATION?		HOW MANY TIMES?	
ARE YOU CURRENTLY UNDER A DOCTOR'S CARE?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	
ARE YOU CURRENTLY TAKING ANY MEDICATIONS?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	
WHAT KIND OF MEDICATION?			
HAVE YOU READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE GENERAL RELEASE FORM?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	
STATE THE REASON YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RIDE-ALONG OBSERVER PROGRAM:			
_____ Signature of Applicant		_____ Date	
_____ Signature of Parent/Guardian (if under age 18)		_____ Date	
_____ Signature of Volunteer Chief/Battalion Chief		_____ Date	
DATE OF RIDE: _____			
TIME PERIOD OF RIDE: _____			
OFFICE OF THE FIRE MARSHAL USE:			
APPROVED <input type="checkbox"/>			
DENIED <input type="checkbox"/>			

GENERAL RELEASE

In consideration of the Prince George's County Fire/Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Department (hereinafter, "Fire/EMS") granting me permission to accompany a member of the Fire/EMS Department as an observer in the Ride-Along Observer Program, I hereby waive any and all risks and liability for damages, losses, personal injuries, or death which I might suffer, sustain, or cause while participating in the Ride-Along Observer Program. I further waive any and all claims, demands, actions, damages, or suits at law or equity of whatever nature which I have or may hereafter acquire against the Prince George's County, Fire/EMS Department, officers, agents, or employees as a result of my voluntary participation in the Ride-Along Observer Program, and I hereby hold harmless such persons and entities. In the event that a demand or claim, whether groundless or otherwise, is made against the entities and/or persons set forth herein, I agree to indemnify those persons and/or entities for all damages, attorney fees, and costs incurred in defending said demand or claim.

I further agree to comply with all rules and regulations of the Ride-Along Observer Program and any instructions or orders issued by members of the Fire/EMS Department in connection with the Ride-Along Observer Program. I certify that I am aware of the potential risk involved in accompanying a Fire/EMS officer and/or employee during the performance of his/her duties.

WAIVER AGREEMENT: I hereby acknowledge that I fully understand the consequences of this waiver and that it is a voluntary and intelligent act on my part.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT **DATE**

Signature of Witness

SIGNATURE OF PARENT/GUARDIAN **DATE**
(if applicant is under 18 years of age)

Date

Valid for the following dates: _____