



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

General Order Number: 13-02	Effective Date: December 19, 2023
Division: Public Affairs	
Chapter: Ride-Along Observer Program	
By Order of the County Fire Chief: Tiffany D. Green	Issue Date: December 19, 2023

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 those wishing to observe the emergency operations of the Prince George's County Fire/Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Department or its member volunteer corporations. All members are to ensure the safety and success of all persons involved in the program, not limited to the Non-Affiliated Observer, Recruit 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

Non-Affiliated Observer – A person who is not a career or volunteer member of the Prince George's County Fire/EMS Department. This definition specifically includes members of Fire/EMS departments outside of Prince George's County.

Recruit Observer – An affiliated member who has submitted an application to a volunteer corporation and successfully passed the application background check.

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 least 16 years of age. This information shall be 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. All observers under the age of 18 years shall not be authorized to ride on any apparatus or stay overnight in any fire station between 2200 hours and 0700 hours any day of the week.
- C. Other requirements or restrictions may be issued by the Office of the Fire Chief and will be provided in writing to the Department via memorandum.



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

- D. Persons wishing to participate in the Ride-Along Observer Program must schedule their ride-along a minimum of 72 hours in advance. This will allow 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. The Volunteer Services Office (VSO) will notify the Volunteer Fire Chief of these extenuating circumstances at least 24 hours prior to the scheduled ride along if the ride along will not be permitted to occur.
- E. All observers must review the rules governing this policy, complete a Ride-Along Observer Program Application and sign a General Release. The observer will submit the application and general release to the station where the observer will ride.
- F. All Observers will be limited to four (4) opportunities per calendar year. Each opportunity cannot exceed 72 hours.
- G. Requests for special exceptions must specify the time frame and be submitted in writing to the Emergency Services Deputy Fire Chief or the County Fire Chief. 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.
- H. Observers must wear appropriate clothing that is neat, clean, and does not reflect unfavorably on themselves or the department. All clothing must not contain any offensive writing or graphics and may not present a safety hazard (i.e.: hanging chains, excessively baggy clothes). All observers are required to wear:
 - 1. Long Pants
 - 2. Short Sleeve Shirt
 - 3. Closed-Toe Shoes

NOTE: At no time are observers allowed to wear shorts, sleeveless tops, work-out clothing, any open-toed shoes, sandals, Crocs or a similar style shoe.

- I. Observers must wear an orange helmet and/or a safety vest, clearly marked with "OBSERVER." **No other structural firefighting PPE will be worn.**
- J. Observers shall always remain under the control of the unit officer-in-charge. 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 an Immediate Danger to Life or Health (IDLH) atmosphere or a building that has been involved in



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

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.

K. Recruit Observer

1. Once a Non-Affiliated Observer applies to be a member of the Department, they can no longer be considered a Non-Affiliated Observer.
2. These persons can continue to ride as a Recruit Observer, providing they have remaining opportunities not to exceed four (4) total ride-along observations per calendar year or until they have successfully passed the application background check and are voted in as a member of a volunteer corporation.
3. Should a member fail any portion of the application process or fail to complete the process within 6 months, their observer privileges will be revoked.
4. Once a Recruit Observer completes Volunteer Recruit School, the person is no longer a Recruit Observer.

- L. The Department/Volunteer Corporation reserves the right to end a scheduled ride-along at any time.

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 Company Chief or Battalion Chief for review and approval.
- B. The Volunteer Company Chief or designee must ensure the complete forms 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 Company Chief or Battalion Chief, the completed forms, along with a copy of the driver's license/photo identification card, are sent to the Volunteer Services Office (VSO) using the provided link or from external sources via email at pgfdvsc@co.pg.md.us.

1. Sending from County Email Addresses - [Quick Link for Ride-Along Registration](#).
2. Sending from External Email Addresses – [Quick Link for Ride-Along Registration](#)
 - Send email to pgfdvsc@co.pg.md.us with attachments (Application & Waiver)
 - The email subject line must include "Ride-Along Observer Application and the individual's name;" (EXAMPLE: **Ride-Along Observer Application – John Smith**).

NOTE: The VSO Office shall acknowledge receipt of the email, track and monitor approvals. The VSO 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.



PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MARYLAND

FIRE/EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT GENERAL ORDER

- C. 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.
- D. The Office of the Fire Marshal will notify the VSO of the background check results (approved or denied) via email. The VSO will immediately notify the respective Volunteer Company Chief or Battalion Chief via email of the results (approved or denied). It is the responsibility of the respective Volunteer Company Chief/Battalion Chief requesting approval of the ride-along to monitor emails for this approval or denial.
- E. If the request is denied, the respective Volunteer Company Chief/Battalion Chief will notify the observer applicant, and the scheduled ride-along is canceled.
- F. If the request is approved, the VSO will notify the respective Volunteer Company Chief/Battalion Chief and pertinent Duty Chief. The Volunteer Company Chief/Battalion Chief will notify the observer applicant that the ride-along can occur as scheduled.
- G. VSO shall maintain a database to track the individual's participation in the Ride-Along Observer Program.
- H. VSO shall maintain a file of all applications to participate in the Ride-Along Observer Program.
- I. Once the Fire Commission Office has received an application for membership from an individual, they will email the VSO to inform the office that the individual is no longer eligible to participate in the Ride-Along Observer Program.
- J. Once a member successfully passes the application background check, the Volunteer Corporation is responsible for notifying the VSO of their status as a Recruit Observer. The VSO will maintain a database of Recruit Observers and work with the Volunteer Corporations to ensure the application completion requirement is met within the allotted time.

III. Compliance

- A. The Volunteer Company Chief will be responsible for ensuring that the observer follows all established rules associated with the Ride-Along Observer Program.
- B. Stations that violate this General Order may not participate in this program for a period specified by the County Fire Chief and may be subject to disciplinary action.

REFERENCES

N/A



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

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 Company 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
(if applicant is under 18 years of age)

DATE

Date

Valid for the following dates: _____