



Road death investigation guide for bereaved families (England and Wales)

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Road death investigation guide for bereaved families in England and Wales

RoadPeace: the national charity for road crash victims

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Contents

Abbreviations and acronyms	41
Introduction	6
1.1 Purpose and Overview	6
1.2 Structure of this guide	7
2 Road death investigation – an overview	10
2.1 National guidance	10
2.2 Policy file	11
2.3 Investigation team	11
3 Initial response	14
3.1 Site evidence	14
3.2 Vehicles	14
3.3 Drivers	15
3.4 Witnesses	16
3.5 'Hit and run' collisions	16
4 Vehicle inspection	18
4.1 Key vehicle checks	18
5 Site investigation	19
5.1 Speed estimation	19
5.2 Local authority	19
6 Witnesses	21
6.1 Witness boards and appeals	21
6.2 Interviews	21
7 Driver investigations	23
7.1 Eyesight	23
7.2 Driving record	23
7.3 Mobile phone use	23
7.4 Fatigue	23
7.5 Health	23
7.6 Motor vehicle insurance	23
7.7 Interview	24
8 Criminal charge	25
8.1 Introduction	25
8.2 Charging standards	26
8.3 Charging decision	27
8.4 Meeting with family	28
9 Rights of bereaved families	30
9.1 Legal rights	30
9.2 MoJ Code for Victims	30
9.3 Victim Personal Statement	32

9.4	Emergency services and other sources of information	32
9.5	Site visit	33
9.6	Pre inquest meeting	33
9.7	Costs	33
9.8	Media	33
9.9	Complaints	34
10	Ensuring lessons are learned	36
10.1	Quality assurance of investigation	12
10.2	Exit meeting	34
10.3	Closing note	36
	Summary	37
11	References	40
	Appendix A: Bereaved family checklist	41

Introduction

1.1 Purpose and Overview

If you are reading this guide through personal need, then please accept our sincere condolences. This guide is based on our experiences of similar bereavements through road crashes and has been written to support you through the immediate post-crash stage and to help you cope at this terrible time.

RoadPeace was established to help ensure families receive the emotional and practical support they need. This includes providing information on what happens following a crash, including explanation of the procedures involved in collision investigation and criminal prosecution.

Bereaved families are given a booklet, produced by Brake, and funded by the Ministry of Justice. But this booklet is more geared towards culpable crashes with a focus on criminal prosecution and civil compensation.

As indicated by its title, RoadPeace's guide focuses on the investigation after a fatal crash. And the importance of a proper road death investigation cannot be overstated. It is crucial to fair criminal prosecutions and civil compensation settlements. It is also essential for the bereaved to know that the unnatural death of their loved one is treated with the scrutiny and priority it deserves. Even where there is no criminal charge, there may be lessons that can be learned that could help prevent future deaths.

A minority of fatal crashes result in a driver being prosecuted, This guide is written from the perspective that the driver has survived the crash and that a criminal prosecution is possible.

This guide is based on the experience of our members and the calls to our helpline over the past 25 years. Any repetition is intentional as we believe key points are worth reinforcing. Taking on board new and complex information at a time of great personal stress is inevitably difficult. RoadPeace can provide clarification and guidance.

We can be contacted on our Helpline (0845 4500 355) or our office (020 7733 1603). Both are open Monday – Friday 9am to 5pm. We can put you in touch with a bereaved befriender who can speak with you and empathise. Or call for information on the investigation, prosecution, inquest or compensation. You can call as often and for as long as you choose, and you do not need to be a member of RoadPeace to receive our help.

1.2 Structure of this guide

We have tried to make this guide as clear as possible and organised it as:

Chapter 2: Road death investigation-an overview explains the recommended policy under the latest national road death investigation guidance, including the basic composition of a fatal collision investigation team, and key documents.

Chapter 3: At-scene investigation summarises what evidence is collected at the crash site in the first hours and days after the crash.

Chapter 4: Vehicle examination outlines the inspection into the condition of the vehicle. This is to check if any defects caused the crash or contributed to the severity of the casualties.

Chapter 5: Site investigation reviews the information collected at the crash location, including its collision history, maintenance record and any local community concerns about the site.

Chapter 6: Witnesses explains the steps involved in identifying and contacting witnesses and collecting formal statements.

Chapter 7: Driver investigation explains the questioning of the driver which will normally occur after witness statements have been collected.

Chapter 8: Criminal charges summarises the possible causing death by driving criminal charges available, including the most recent prosecution statistics showing how often these charges are used. It also explains who makes the charging decision.

Chapter 9: Rights and role of bereaved families clarifies what the family is entitled to, and what is considered good practice.

Chapter 10: Ensuring lessons are learned discusses how the findings of the investigation can be used to reduce the risk to others and reduce any additional suffering of the bereaved.

References are listed at the back of this guide and a glossary in Appendix A. A checklist for bereaved families is provided in Appendix B.

For more information on the charging decision, criminal court proceedings and sentencing, please contact RoadPeace for our guides on the Charging Decision, Going to Court and Sentencing. Inquests are also covered in a separate RoadPeace guide.

Chapter summary: Introduction

- This guide is to help families understand what is involved in a road death investigation.
- RoadPeace has a national helpline and can provide you with emotional support or practical information. We can put you in contact with another person who has been bereaved by a road crash.
- Additional guides are available, including on the charging decision, criminal prosecution and inquests.

2 Road death investigation – an overview

This chapter reviews the current recommended guidance on road death investigation and explains the structure of the investigation team.

2.1 National guidance

Since 2013, the College of Policing is responsible for producing national guidance on road death investigation. Its '*Investigating Road Deaths*' is authorised police practice (APP) and has replaced the Association of Chief Police Officers' (ACPO) much longer Road Death Investigation Manual (RDIM).

The RDIM was introduced in 2001 to promote good practice in fatal collision investigations. It was last revised in 2007. Key sections of both references are quoted in this guide.

The principle of approaching a fatal crash as an unlawful killing, and not a road accident, was first introduced in the 2001 RDIM.

All road deaths to be approached as unlawful killings

The RP lead investigator must begin a road death investigation by adopting the mindset of unlawful killing, until the contrary is proved substantially.

(College of Policing, 2017)

The police are recommended, but not required to follow national guidance. There are 43 independent police services in England and Wales. Each is able to determine how much effort, priority and resources it invests in its investigations, including those involving road deaths.

Road death investigations are now led by the Roads Policing (RP) lead investigator, rather than a Senior Investigating Officer (RP Lead investigator). Which RP lead investigator assigned to a fatal crash will be determined by the complexity of the crash. National guidance defines four basic classifications of fatal collision investigation.

Table 2.1 Road death investigation classification

Category	Factors
A+	Assessed as likely homicide investigation or where complexity requires the deployment of a nationally registered RP Lead investigator
A	Confirmed fatality—one or more vehicles failed to stop and/or drivers decamped or other factors are present that significantly increases the complexity of the investigation.
B	Confirmed fatality—all drivers/riders are known or can be immediately identified.
C	Confirmed fatality—driver/rider only killed, no third party

involvement—inquest only.

- D Confirmed fatality---driver/rider only killed, death due to natural causes, may involve a third party—no inquest necessary..

Fatal crashes may be categorised according to perceived levels of culpability. But it is important to appreciate that the national guidance does not recommend approaching any fatal crash as an accident.

2.2 Policy file

The police keep a policy file in which all strategic policy decisions on the investigation are recorded. The policy file is the definitive record for reference with any court query or complaints proceedings. Bereaved families do not have a right to see the investigation policy file.

2.3 Investigation team

The road death investigation team includes five key roles. It is possible for someone to cover more than one role. These roles are:

RP lead investigator is the decision maker and has overall responsibility for the crash investigation. This includes areas such as finance and resources, scene management, media, policy decisions, coroner and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) liaison, criminal charges, as well as any sensitive issues.

RP lead investigators are expected to attend the crash scene. The role is not department or rank specific and the appointment of the RP Lead investigator depends upon the category of the investigation (See Table 2.1). The RP Lead investigator may be changed if the category of the investigation is re-classified.

A national standard of competences for RP Lead investigators has been developed and is accompanied by a training package, developed by the College of Policing.

Forensic collision investigator (FCI) is responsible for the forensic collision reconstruction, including determining the speeds involved, and preparing the written collision investigation report, which will be passed to the CPS and/or coroner. They will be the independent expert witness for the court. They are not allowed to have contact with the family until after any criminal court case is over or it has been decided that there will not be a criminal charge.

Vehicle examiner assesses the condition of the vehicle to determine if contributed to the collision.

Investigator/Enquiry officer is responsible for taking witness statements and will have had special training for this role.

Family Liaison Officer (FLO) is the main point of contact for the family. The FLO is to keep them informed of the progress of the investigation. In any case where an FLO has not been assigned, the RP Lead investigator is expected to act as the FLO.

The police describe the role of the FLO as including:

- Passing appropriate information regarding the enquiry to the family (with the agreement of the RP Lead investigator in order to avoid compromising the enquiry).
- Organising the viewing, identification and release of the body.
- Ensuring the return of property is carried out tactfully, sensitively and in accordance with the family's wishes.
- Informing the family of suitable support agencies and sources of information (ACPO and NPIA, 2007).

All FLOs have volunteered for this role and they will have received special training. FLOs keep a log of all contact with the bereaved family. RoadPeace encourages bereaved families to do the same. This is not a time to rely on memory.

Do not be afraid to ask questions and appear “pushy” at this point. Different families will have different information needs and FLOs may wait to be asked before offering information which may be upsetting to the family. They may also not want to contact families just to tell them that there is no news, although to many, no news is still news.

Families should inform the FLO how often they want to be kept updated and by what mode (phone, email, etc.). Police often assume that it is not worth “disturbing” the family with the news that there is no news. But RoadPeace often hears how important it is for families to hear even that there has been no developments. They do want to feel forgotten.

2.4 Quality assurance of investigation

National guidance recommends that police develop an “appropriate review process” which should consider the following:

- Timing
- The reviewing officer and the focus of the review
- Procedures
- Reports and subsequent action
- Disclosure

(College of Policing, 2017)

Chapter summary: Road death investigation

- The College of Policing's *Investigating Road Deaths* promotes good practice but it is advisory. Each police force is independent and determines the resources allocated to road death investigation.
- The Senior Investigation Officer is in charge of all collision investigation related decisions.
- The police will develop an investigation plan and record all key decisions in a policy file.
- The Family Liaison Officer is part of the investigation team. Their role is to keep the family informed. They also keep a log and report back on anything they learn from the family.
- Bereaved families are advised to keep a written record of the investigation progress and a log of the contacts with the police, coroner's officer, solicitors, CPS, etc.
- Each family has individual needs and expectations. Some want lots of information, others a summary and others none at all. There is no right and wrong and the police may wait to be asked by the family before offering information.

3 Initial response

The first priority for the police is to secure the safety of the scene, to prevent any further people from being hurt. The police will then tend to the victims and provide first aid. Only after the site is safe and victims stabilised, will the police begin to collect the evidence.

3.1 Site evidence

The police will record key information such as the vehicle locations and skidmarks. They will prepare a plan diagramming the crash from the physical evidence. The plan is 'post collision' and shows the location where the vehicles stopped.

Photos will be taken, either by a specialist police photographer or by the collision investigator. If the crash occurred during the evening, daylight photos should be taken the next day. Photos should be taken of any damage to vehicles and street furniture.

The collection of scene evidence has been improved with the roll-out of 3D laser scanning of collision scenes. These are also intended to reduce the time of any road closures.

Police should also check public and private CCTV cameras. Families can ask about the area in which CCTV was checked and the time period covered.

Not all photographs will need to be shown at the inquest or trial. Families can ask the police for a copy of all the photographs taken at the scene. These can be provided after the inquest or criminal prosecution is over and the case is closed.

The police should also check any traffic signals and streetlights near the scene to check that they were working correctly at the time of the collision.

3.2 Vehicles

At the scene, the police will examine and note the position of the control systems within the vehicles, i.e. light switches, gears, and the condition of the seat belts and airbags. The police will check that the vehicles involved have up-to-date documentation, including MOTs.

Mirrors will be checked to see if they are correctly adjusted. This should be a priority with lorries for their well-documented problem with blind spots. See our guide on collisions with HGVs for more information.

With lorries, the police will check if the tachograph has been used. A tachograph is a machine which measures vehicle speeds and records when the vehicle was being driven, so that driving hours and behaviour can be monitored. It is a criminal offence to have a tachograph that is not working.

In a few cases, such as where the driver has left the scene, the police can seal the vehicle and remove it for forensic analysis where more tests will be done.

The presence of an event data recorder (black box) will be checked later by the vehicle examiner. Black boxes can be found in some newer cars and police vehicles. They can provide information on key factors as the braking, travelling and impact speed, as well as whether the lights or turn indicators were in use.

3.3 Drivers

At the scene, drivers will only be asked for their contact details and a brief statement. They will be interviewed in detail later, normally after all witnesses have been interviewed. If there is evidence of a criminal offence, the driver may also be arrested at the scene.

If a driver is arrested, their fingerprints and DNA will be taken. This allows their identity to be confirmed.

Drink driving. Since 1996, it has been ACPO policy to breathtest every driver involved in a fatal collision. If drivers refuse, they may be charged with an offence that carries the same penalties as testing positive for drink driving.

If a driver is unconscious, a blood sample may be taken at the hospital, but it can only be analysed for alcohol after the driver gives permission. However drivers can be charged if they do not give permission for the hospital sample to be tested.

The breathtest conducted by police at the roadside is a screening test that will indicate by colour if a driver is below or over the drink drive limit. If the driver tests positive for drink driving, then an evidential test will be conducted.

Roadside evidential breathalysers have been bought by the Home Office for police. These record the precise breath alcohol reading and can provide a printout. If these are not available, drivers need to be taken to a police station for an evidential test to be conducted which will give the exact recording. As with speeding, there is a technical tolerance allowed and drink drivers may not be prosecuted if the evidential test shows them to be slightly over the limit (approximately 15%).

One in four car drivers killed during the day is under the influence of alcohol, although this rises to one of every two car drivers killed at night.

(DfT, 2014)

All fatalities over the age of 16, including drivers killed in a crash, will have their blood tested for alcohol or drugs as part of the post mortem procedures. Younger fatalities can also be tested for alcohol and drugs but this is not standard practice. The findings will be reported in the post mortem report and presented at the inquest. This means that they will be in the public domain.

Drug driving Very few drivers in fatal crashes are tested for drug impairment at present. According to the Department for Transport (DfT) Contributory Factors Analysis, only 3% of fatal crashes in 2014 were reported by the police to involve a driver under the influence of drugs (DfT, 2015).

Drivers must be brought to the police station or a hospital for a blood test to be conducted to determine drug usage. National guidance recommends that if the

driver is suspected of being impaired by drug use and a police officer has been trained in Drug Recognition and how to conduct Fitness Impairment Testing (FIT), then the driver should be FIT tested at the roadside, but this is only for screening purposes and a blood test will need to be done.

Driving licence. Drivers are not required to carry their driving licence with them. The police can check on the police national computer to see if the driver has a valid driving license. Drivers may be asked to bring their license to a police station. Police will check to see if the licence is valid and covers the type of vehicle being driven at the time of the crash.

Driving bans. Drivers in fatal crashes who test positive for drink or drug driving do not automatically have their licence taken away. It is only after they have been found guilty that the disqualification period begins.

An interim driving ban can be imposed as a bail condition but this requires the court to be convinced that the driver is at risk of re-offending. This very rarely happens.

Motor insurance. The Motor Insurers Database (MID) has details of all motor insurance policies. Thus the police are able to check the vehicle registration number and trace any motor insurance policy to see if the driver was insured to drive that specific vehicle.

3.4 Witnesses

As with the driver, the Police only collect basic information from witnesses at the crash scene. This does not constitute a formal statement. The police will record the contact details of witnesses and include a short statement (initial account) by each witness in their collision report form.

Any initial questioning should be framed to elicit a brief account of what has been witnessed; a more detailed account should include where and when the collision took place and who was involved or otherwise present.

(ACPO and NPIA 2007)

Witnesses identified at the scene will be given a reference number and details of the officer investigating and a contact number. Formal statements will be taken later and these can be conducted in person or sent by post, depending on the circumstances.

Self Administered Interviews (SAI). The police have piloted the *Self-Administered Interview* approach. This involves asking witnesses to complete a questionnaire as soon as possible, preferably at scene, and not wait to be contacted by the police, as this can take days, if not weeks. Memory is known to worsen with time and so the sooner witness statements can be taken, the better. The SAI approach has been found to help increase and preserve memory recall. Some police forces are using the SAI approach.

3.5 'Hit and run' collisions

Where a driver has failed to stop, the police can respond by:

- Circulating a description of the offender and vehicle (if known)
- Ensuring a suitable marker is placed on the vehicle's Police National Computer record as soon as possible
- Making enquiries with the registered keeper
- Retrospectively searching Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) logs in the relevant area
- Setting up road checks
- Checking abandoned or parked vehicles
- Identifying the route taken
- Recovery of CCTV footage on access and exit routes to help identify suspect(s) and witnesses
- Requesting an appeal be included on the BBC's Crime Watch programme (but relatively few requests can be granted)

Chapter summary: At-scene investigation

Key questions to consider asking include:

- Where the point of impact occurred and how they determined it.
- What the estimated approach and impact vehicle speeds were estimated and how these were calculated.
- What tests, including eyesight, breathalyser and drug impairment, were done on the driver(s) at the crash site.
- What effort has been made to locate witnesses and if there is anything the family can do to assist.
- How the local traffic management system (traffic signals, signs, lights) was checked to see if it contributed to the crash.

4 Vehicle inspection

The vehicle examiner will inspect all vehicles involved in the collision to see if they contributed to the crash or the death. Vehicle defects are believed to contribute to relatively few crashes, but they should always be checked.

4.1 Key vehicle checks

Key checks include:

- **Tyres** The tread and the inflation level of all tyres should be checked to see if they meet the legal tread depth required and the recommended manufacturer's tyre pressure.
- **Mirrors** The police should check if mirrors were properly positioned for the driver's height. This will be a key factor checked in fatal crashes involving lorries.
- **Lights** Front and rear lights should also have been checked at the site, but at times they may be damaged. Vehicle examiners can arrange forensic test to see if the light was on when the crash occurred. The vehicle examiner's conclusions should be seen as more reliable than a witness testimony.
- **Seatbelts** These will be checked to see that they are not broken and have the right amount of tension. It can also be determined if they were in use at the time of the collision.
- **Metal strength** Examiners will look for signs of metal failure, especially with older vehicles.
- **Brakes** Brakes will be checked to see if they are worn or defective.
- **Steering** The steering will be checked in light of the direction the vehicle took.
- **Airbags** Vehicle examiners will check that airbags deployed properly, after the crash, and if they contributed to the injuries, another rare event.
- **Tachograph** Digital tachographs are replacing manual tachograph charts in commercial vehicles. Vehicle examiners can download the digital information which is retained on the tachograph system for 12 months. Drivers using manual records are supposed to keep records for the past 28 days.
- **Event data recorders (EDR)** The police will also check whether the vehicle has an EDR (black box), which records key factors such as speed, braking, lights, turn indicators, etc.

Chapter summary: Vehicle inspection

You can ask:

- What will be done to determine if the vehicle condition contributed to the crash or the victim's death.
- If the tyres, mirrors, lights, seatbelts, vehicle frame, brakes, steering, or airbags were defective.

5 Site investigation

The collision investigator will contact the local authority for information on the site. Families can also ask for this information from local authorities. Collision data is not classified information.

5.1 Speed estimation

Speed is almost always a key factor, if not in the causing the crash, then in causing the death. Speeding refers to both vehicle speed exceeding the road's speed limit and also speed that is inappropriate for the circumstances.

As shown below, Rule 125 of the Highway Code states that the speed limit is not always appropriate and motorists need to reduce speed if there are vulnerable road users.

The speed limit is the absolute maximum and does not mean it is safe to drive at that speed irrespective of conditions. Driving at speeds too fast for the road and traffic conditions is dangerous. You should always reduce your speed when.....sharing the road with pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders, particularly children, and motorcyclists.
Highway Code, DfT (2007)

Families may want to know how the speed estimate was calculated, by whom, and the reliability of the estimate. Speeds can be estimated from skid marks, the distance a victim has been 'thrown', crush damage to other vehicles, witness statements and EDR (though the latter are very rare). Skid tests will also show if a road's smoothness, and therefore lack of tyre grip, contributed to the crash.

Families are advised to ask for clarification on how estimated speed will be presented; as a range, minimum speed estimated or the best estimate.

CCTV cameras. Both local authority and private CCTV cameras should be checked. This should be done as quickly as possible and should also include examination of any approach and exit roads to the collision site, especially if it was a 'hit and run' collision.

5.2 Local authority

Collision history. The police will inquire about the collision history of the crash site. This will usually mean the number and severity of crashes within the last three years and the type of crashes involved, e.g. involving cyclists or pedestrians, head-on or right angle, skidding related.

Speeding and/or community concern. The police may also enquire about local concerns about speeding or dangerous driving. The road may have been known locally as a place where a crash was '*waiting to happen*'.

Maintenance record. The police may also enquire about the maintenance record of both the road and any traffic management equipment (signals) and the last time the road surface was re-laid.

Traffic signals and junction layout. Any traffic signals at the crash site should be checked to see that they were working and properly aligned. Signal timings should also be checked to confirm that adequate crossing time for pedestrians was allowed. The layout of the junction, including road markings, will be assessed to see if they contributed to the crash.

Some local authorities send a highway engineer out to inspect the scene of a fatal crash to check that there were no obvious problems with the site before the crash or after the crash, as fences and signs may need to be repaired.

Chapter summary: Site investigation

You can ask about the:

- Number and type of collisions at the crash site in recent years.
- Maintenance record of the site.
- Any local concerns about speeding, visibility, etc.
- Any traffic signal, road layout or engineering issues.
- Bereaved families may also ask the local authority about the site as this is not classified information.

6 Witnesses

The success of any fatal collision investigation usually depends on the accuracy and detail of the material obtained from witnesses.

(ACPO and NPIA, 2007)

Witnesses can either be independent or be known to one of the parties involved. They may have seen the actual collision, or heard or seen what happened after or before the crash.

Witnesses may be traumatised by what they have seen and this can affect their memory. It is also very difficult to estimate speed accurately and judgements may be affected by the speeds of other vehicles or by engine sounds.

6.1 Witness boards and appeals

The police should put up witness boards at the scene of the crash, asking for any witnesses to contact them. These should be left in place for a minimum of two weeks.

Witnesses can also be identified by the following means:

- Examination of Automatic Number Plate Recognition data
- Interviews with other witnesses
- Viewing CCTV
- Conducting house to house enquiries
- Road checks
- Suspect interviews
- Making enquiries at significant locations near the scene.

(ACPO and NPIA, 2007)

Bereaved families can also offer to help through an appeal with the local media or distribution of leaflets at the scene. Family appeals receive a better response than that issued by the police alone.

6.2 Interviews

Formal interviews should be conducted according to the standards laid down by the Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) Act of 1984.

In London, the police aim to interview significant witnesses within 48 hours of the crash. Witnesses are usually allowed to keep a copy of their statement as months may pass until the court trial. If a copy has not been provided, then the witnesses should be allowed to read their statements before testifying in any court, including the Coroner's court.

After a witness has provided a statement, they will receive updates from the police at key times, such as when a:

- suspect is arrested

- decision is made to take no further action or use a non court based disposal of a suspect (such as a caution or reprimand)
- suspect is charged
- suspect has been bailed and the, relevant bail conditions and first court hearings
- hearing date for any defendant remanded in custody
- decision has been made by the CPS for no further action.
- a file has been submitted to the Coroner.

(ACPO and NPIA, 2007)

All these are also key events for the bereaved family.

Chapter summary: Witnesses

You should be informed:

- How many witnesses have been identified.
- Who is to interview witnesses and when.
- If you can help with a media appeal for information or witnesses.

7 Driver investigation

This section explains the basic checks conducted by the police on the drivers involved.

7.1 Eyesight

Police should check the eyesight of the driver as soon as possible by having the driver read a license number plate. An eyesight check may be conducted in daylight even if the crash occurred in the evening. The police do not have the power to order a driver to have their eyesight tested by an optician.

7.2 Driving record

The driver's driving record will be checked by the police to see if there have been any previous violations or convictions for motoring offences or other offences. This information may be used as "Bad character" evidence. But it is not likely to be used until the time of sentencing, when it may be considered as an aggravating factor if a pattern of offending is shown.

7.3 Mobile phone use

The police are not required to check mobile phones. They may ask drivers to volunteer their phones to be checked for use before or around the time of the collision. They check this if there is a reason to believe that the driver was on the phone at the time, eg from a witness statement or inexplicable behaviour by the driver. They can also seek legal permission to access the mobile phone records.

7.4 Fatigue

Fatigue is difficult to prove and used to be considered a mitigating factor. This is no longer the case as there is now increased recognition that it is a condition that comes on gradually and that drivers have time to respond to the warning signs and avoid endangering others. Sleep apnoea is a medical condition known to be a problem with lorry drivers.

7.5 Health

Drivers will be asked about any medical conditions. It is rare for medical records to be requested or for doctors to be contacted to confirm the state of health of the driver. This will usually only happen if the driver claims that a medical condition, e.g. diabetes, epilepsy, contributed to the crash occurrence.

7.6 Motor vehicle insurance

If the collision involved an uninsured driver, this will affect the compensation process, and the Motor Insurers Bureau (MIB) will become involved. This is an independent organisation established by law to compensate for injuries and damage caused by uninsured or untraced drivers (hit and run).

7.7 Interview

A driver is interviewed if they are suspected of causing the crash. The Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) legislation restricts the number of times a suspect can be interviewed. Subsequent interviews are allowed only if new evidence comes to light or to clear up any confusion. Hence, they wait to interview the driver last, after other witnesses, to make sure they have all the evidence available.

It is hard for families to understand why so much time can pass before the driver is interviewed. But this is required by police procedures.

Chapter summary: Driver investigation

You can ask about:

- The results of any drink or drug test conducted.
- Whether checks on mobile phone records and eyesight were done.
- Insurance details.
- Why the driver(s) needs to be interviewed last.

8 Criminal charge

8.1 Introduction

This section explains the criminal charges available for the CPS to prosecute drivers. It also clarifies the role of the police and CPS in charging.

There are six causing death by driving charges available. These include the following:

Causing death by dangerous driving

This charge must be heard in the Crown Court and carries a maximum prison sentence of 14 years. A driving ban of two years is mandatory, according to the Sentencing Guidelines.

In 2014, there were 122 drivers convicted with 93% receiving a custodial sentence.

Causing death by careless driving whilst under the influence of drink and drugs

This charge must be heard in the Crown Court and also carries a maximum prison sentence of 14 years. It also has a two year driving ban.

In 2014, there were 21 drivers convicted of this charge with 95% receiving a custodial sentence.

Causing death by careless or inconsiderate driving

Introduced in August 2008, this charge can be tried in either the Crown Court or the Magistrates Court. The minimum sentence is a community order and one year disqualification with a maximum prison sentence of five years.

In 2015, 176 drivers were convicted of this charge with 27% being sentenced to prison.

Causing death whilst driving unlicensed or uninsured

Also introduced in 2008, this charge has been revised. In addition to a driver being unlicensed or uninsured, it now requires a moving error, although it does not have to be as serious enough to qualify as careless driving.

The minimum sentence is a community order and a disqualification period of at least one year. The maximum custodial sentence is two years.

In 2015, there were only 2 drivers convicted of this charge, with one sent to prison.

Causing death by disqualified driving

This charge was just introduced in 2015 and carries a maximum ten year prison sentence. It must be heard in the Crown Court.

Causing death by aggravating vehicle taking

This charge carries a maximum custodial sentence of 14 years.

In 2014, three drivers were prosecuted for this charge with all convicted. Only one was sent to prison.

8.2 Charging standards

A common question is whether driving is bad enough to qualify as dangerous or just careless. The CPS have given the following examples of driving which qualifies as dangerous, careless or inconsiderate.

Dangerous driving	Careless driving	Inconsiderate driving
Racing or competitive driving;	Overtaking on the inside;	Flashing of lights to force other drivers in front to give way;
Speed, which is highly inappropriate for the prevailing road or traffic conditions;	Driving inappropriately close to another vehicle;	Misuse of any lane to avoid queuing or gain some other advantage over other drivers;
Aggressive driving, such as sudden lane changes, cutting into a line of vehicles, or driving much too close to a vehicle;	Inadvertently driving through a red light;	Unnecessarily remaining in an overtaking lane;
Disregard of traffic lights and other road signs, which, on an objective analysis, would appear to be deliberate;	Emerging from a side road into the path of another vehicle;	Unnecessarily slow driving or braking without good cause;
Disregard of warnings from fellow passengers;	Tuning a car radio;	Driving with un-dipped headlights which dazzle oncoming drivers;
Overtaking which could not have been carried out safely;	Using a hand-held mobile phone or other hand-held electronic equipment where the driver was avoidably distracted by that use;	Driving through a puddle causing pedestrians to be splashed;
Driving a vehicle with a load which presents a danger to other road	Selecting and lighting a cigarette or similar where the driver was avoidably distracted by that use.	Driving a bus in such a way as to alarm passengers
		Unnecessarily slow driving or braking without good cause

users;

Where the driver is suffering from impaired ability, such as having an arm or leg in plaster, or impaired eyesight;

Driving when too tired to stay awake;

Driving a vehicle knowing it has a dangerous defect;

Using a hand-held mobile phone or other hand-held electronic equipment when the driver was avoidably and dangerously distracted by that use;

Reading a newspaper/map (this was previously classified as careless);

Talking to and looking at a passenger where the driver was avoidably and dangerously distracted by that;

Selecting and lighting a cigarette, or similar, in circumstances where the driver was avoidably and dangerously distracted by that.

Source: CPS (2013)

8.3 Charging decision

If the police think there may be enough evidence to support a criminal charge, they will pass the investigation file to the CPS. But they can decide, on their own and without any CPS check, that the evidence does not support a criminal prosecution. In the majority of fatal crashes, there is no criminal prosecution.

If the bereaved family thinks a prosecution is justified, they can request the police review their charging decision. Some police areas have restricted this right to a review to only those cases where a driver was arrested and interviewed under caution. For more information on appealing the police decision not to prosecute, ask your FLO and contact RoadPeace.

Cases referred to the CPS do not mean a criminal charge will occur. For cases that are referred to the CPS, they must consider two basic factors when making a charging decision. These are:

- 1 Is there enough evidence to secure a conviction?
- 2 Is it in the public interest to prosecute?

Like the police, the CPS can decide against criminal prosecution. But families do have the right to request a review of the CPS charging decision, if the CPS are proposing not to prosecute. But bereaved families do not have the right to appeal the CPS decision to prosecute for a more lenient charge that what the family thought was appropriate.

For more information on how to appeal the CPS decision not to prosecute, ask your FLO or contact RoadPeace.

8.4 Meeting with family

The CPS are supposed to write to bereaved families explaining their charging decision. But families usually first hear this from their FLO. The CPS may also offer a meeting to explain their decision but this is not the same as reviewing or reconsidering it..

Victim Focus scheme According to CPS Prosecution Policy, families bereaved by road crashes are to receive an “enhanced service”.

This involves a meeting with the CPS where they explain the procedures involved in a Crown Court hearing and answer any questions the family may have.

Please contact RoadPeace for further information on criminal prosecutions and road deaths as we have separate guides on the Charging Decision and Going to Court.

Chapter summary: Charging decision

You can ask:

- The police can decide no further action without needing to consult the CPS. Families should be able to appeal the police decision not to prosecute.
- The CPS consider the evidence and the public interest when making their decision whether or not to prosecute.
- The CPS are to explain the charging decision to a bereaved family. Families have the right to review the CPS decision not to prosecute. But they cannot appeal a decision to charge for a lesser offence.
- There are six basic causing death by driving charges. Examples of what qualifies as dangerous and careless and inconsiderate have been given by the CPS.
- Intent is irrelevant and short periods of very bad driving can qualify as dangerous.

9 Rights of bereaved families

This section summarises the legal rights of bereaved families and the MoJ's Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (Victims' Code).

9.1 Right to information

All bereaved families are entitled to be informed of the name, address and insurance details of the driver involved (Road Traffic Act 1988). These details may not be provided straight after the crash if there are concerns a driver may be harassed. You should know the name of the driver involved if you need to contact the CPS or courts about the case as it will be filed under the name of the driver, not the victim.

9.2 MoJ Victims' Code

In November 2015, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) updated their Code of Practice for Victims of Crime which specified the services victims of crime in England and Wales should expect to receive from the police, CPS and Probation Service. Although it is not legally binding, statutory organisations are expected to adhere to it.

Bereaved families of road death victims are entitled to receive the services specified when a driver is expected to be charged with causing the death.

Key services relevant to those bereaved by road crashes who qualify under the Code include:

- A right to information about their crime within specified time scales, including the right to be notified of any arrests and court cases. This is usually a five day timescale.
- A dedicated police FLO officer to be assigned to a bereaved family.
- All victims to be told about local support services available.
- Flexibility with regard to opting in or out of receiving services to ensure victims receive the level of service they want.

All police forces in England and Wales should ensure that victims of crime and their families receive information and support.

9.2.1 FLO and being kept informed

As mentioned previously, the FLO is the investigation team member responsible for keeping the bereaved family informed of the progress of the investigation. They are also expected to report back to the RP Lead investigator any relevant information the family offers on the victim or the crash circumstances.

FLOs can be under much pressure as they may be assigned several families from different crashes. An FLO should not be assigned two different families from the same crash.

Families should ask who to contact if their FLO is unavailable (for example holiday, sick leave, training) as the role of the FLO is not a full time position. The RP Lead investigator should be able to be contacted, if the FLO is unavailable.

FLOs are supposed to keep a log of all contact with the family noting the dates, names with whom they spoke, reason for contact, and information exchanged. RoadPeace advises families to do the same and to request all key information is put in writing. As stated previously, this is not a time to have to rely on your memory. Families are also recommended to notify the FLO if there are any times (night-time) or days when they do would prefer not to be contacted.

Families will need to provide information for the Coroner on the victim's birth date and location, health details, including doctor's details. You may be asked about any relevant experience the victim had driving a car or riding a motorcycle or bicycle, or familiarity with the crash location. You will be asked for any information you have on the movements of the victim on the day of the crash.

FLOs are expected to collect information on the victim for the investigation. This process is referred to as victim lifestyle enquiries. These will focus on the associations, lifestyle and behaviour patterns relating to the victim, and may be useful for processing an investigation.

Your FLO should find out how often you would like to be updated on the investigation progress. Monthly updates are advised in the Victims' Code. The police are required notify the family within one day of the arrest, interview, release or charge of any suspects (MoJ, 2015).

You can also state your preferred method of contact, including whether you would rather be contacted by email, phone or letter.

RoadPeace encourages families to ask for all key decisions to be put in writing. We also recommend that families specifically state if they want to be informed of:

- When a vehicle is released.
- When the case file is given by the police to the CPS and any criminal charge recommended by the police.
- Any bail conditions. Families may want to ask about possible bail restrictions, including not allowing the suspect driver to continue driving before attending court, or to hand over their passport in case of foreign drivers. Ultimately it is the court that will impose any bail conditions.

The FLO will also inform the family of any charging decision made by the police or the CPS.

RoadPeace produces a separate information sheet on *You and Your FLO*.

9.3 Victim Personal Statement (VPS)

Bereaved families should be given a small leaflet on the VPS by the police. If criminal charges are being considered, families will be asked by the police to make a personal statement about the impact the crime has had on them. VPS do not influence the charging decision nor the conviction decision but they can influence the sentencing decision if families want to plead for a lesser sentence.

Personal statements can be taken at any time up until sentencing. The FLO may advise on the VPS but these are to be written by the victims and neither the police nor the CPS may alter them. Families should keep a copy of their statement at the time it is written.

The VPS will be included in the case papers which are given to the defence and will be seen by the defendant. This also means that, in theory, families can be cross-examined on the content.

Families cannot yet read the VPS out in court, but they can ask for this to be allowed.

Please contact RoadPeace for our information sheet on the VPS if you would like to know more about impact statements or see examples from other bereaved families.

My advice would be to get a close friend or family member to be present when the Police come for a statement, and together try not to let anyone else dictate what you are to say: state what you want to say.

Bereaved father

9.4 Emergency services and other sources of information

Fire and ambulance services may reach the scene before the police and you may want to contact them to ask them for further information, to recap their actions and what they saw and heard at the scene. You do not need police permission to request this information. The press/publicity officer can help put you in touch with the crew that attended the crash scene. Wherever possible, a police officer is supposed to accompany the victim to hospital, if an ambulance is used, to provide continuity at the hospital.

You may want to know if there have been other crashes at the same location. You can contact the relevant local or metropolitan authority to request this information. The three most recent years of data should help you get an accurate and up to date understanding of the recent collision history of the site. Collision data is not classified information and you should not have any problems obtaining this information from the road safety engineer in your local authority.

9.5 Site visit

Many police services will escort the family to the crash scene and explain the circumstances involved, to the best of their knowledge based on the existing information. If your family has not been offered this service and you are interested to visit the scene, please ask your FLO if this can be arranged.

Families may want to see the site as soon as possible, and before much is known about the circumstances of the crash. They can always ask for a return visit with the police at a later date.

Research and RoadPeace experience have shown that many families benefit from being able to understand how the crash happened. This visit also provides families with an opportunity to leave flowers or a plaque at the site in safer conditions, though local authorities may have a policy to remove these as they may be distracting to passing motorists.

9.6 Pre inquest meeting

Many police services offer to meet with the family before the inquest and review the evidence with them to avoid further shock or distress at the time. If this has not been offered, you are entitled to ask for this meeting. You will not be allowed to keep any photographs or copies of witness statements, but you should be able to view all of them so you are better prepared for the inquest.

Please be aware that many police forces will escort families to the crash site and arrange pre inquest meetings but these services may have to be requested by families.

9.7 Costs

The defendant gets a free copy of the police report but bereaved families do not. Families do have to pay for copies of any material required for a civil compensation claim.

Under the coroner reforms introduced in 2013, coroners are expected to disclose more information to bereaved families and are not allowed to charge for any information given before the inquest.

The family should also be informed by the FLO if there are to be any costs to pay for the storage of a vehicle involved in the crash while it is under investigation.

9.8 Media

The police should inform the family before releasing any details of the victim's identity to the press. Families should expect media interest. We advise families to prepare a written statement for the media, as long or as short as they would like. Families should ask the FLO for media advice to ensure they do not say anything that might prejudice the investigation.

There is no honour in being killed by a driver of a vehicle, and bereaved relatives who cannot stay silent are no less dignified than those relatives who do stay silent.

Bereaved mother

9.9 Exit meeting

After the inquest or trial, you may have a final meeting with the FLO. After this the FLO is not expected to be in contact with the family. These 'exit' meetings may also be attended by the RP Lead investigator. This is a good time for families to highlight any suggestions they have for the police on collision investigation or liaising with bereaved families.

Families may also be asked at this time for their feedback on the police or if they want to get involved and support any local road safety campaigns.

9.10 Complaints

If you are dissatisfied with the way in which the investigation has been conducted or the way in which you have been kept informed, you should complain to the RP Lead investigator and this should be done in writing. You should receive a response within 10 days. If you are still dissatisfied then you should write to the Chief Constable. This is the recommended procedure stated in the MoJ Code for Victims of Crime. You are advised to copy both of these letters to your MP and RoadPeace.

Some families contact the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) but the IPCC handles appeals about complaints and not the initial complaints.

Chapter summary: Bereaved families

You are entitled to:

- know the name of the driver(s) involved and their motor insurance policy details.
- ask questions at the inquest (but not those related to criminal or civil liability).
- meet with the CPS where they will explain their charging decision.
- receive information on local and national support services.
- be kept informed of the court case progress, including dates and times of court hearings.
- receive travel expenses for attending court if the driver has been charged with causing the death (this does not include careless driving or other summary charges).

In addition, RoadPeace recommends the police also offer to:

- Escort you to the crash site and explain what is known about the circumstances and allow you to place flowers or a plaque, should you so desire.
- Meet with you before any inquest and show you the evidence, including photographs and witness statements, except for those cases where the bereaved family includes witnesses or the suspect driver.
- Notify you in writing of any key event, such as when they interview the driver or when they pass the file on to the CPS and what, if any, charging recommendation it includes.
- Provide a free copy of the investigation report and offer a meeting to review the case when the investigation is concluded.

10 Ensuring lessons are learned

The investigation....should also be used to identify preventive measures to reduce further deaths and serious injuries on the roads.

College of Policing, 2017

It is important for bereaved families to know that lessons are learned from the death of their loved one and for the risk to others is reduced. This can include implementing road safety measures or a change in policy so that investigations are improved or that bereaved families are treated with the utmost respect and kept properly informed.

Please be sure to discuss any lessons you think need to be learned with your FLO. And RoadPeace would also like to hear from you as to how you think the risk to other families could be decreased, or how investigations can be improved, or families kept better informed and supported.

10.1 Closing note

We hope that this Guide has been useful to you at this time. Do please let us know of any way in which it can be improved, as, sadly, there will be many more families in the future who will need this information.

Please also do not forget that RoadPeace operates a helpline (0845 4500 355) staffed by RoadPeace volunteers who provide confidential, emotional and practical support to anyone who rings. All Helpline volunteers have had personal experience of road crashes and the vast majority are bereaved - callers can telephone to talk through whatever they've been through.

We also operate a "befriender" scheme to put callers in contact with people who are share similar circumstances, such as bereaved mothers, fathers, siblings, or friends. RoadPeace also has local groups and active members who campaign to reduce the risk of road crashes in their communities.

Chapter summary: Lessons learned

You should be informed when the FLO's assignment is finished. You can ask:

- for a final meeting with the FLO and the RP Lead investigator and discuss any good practice or areas where the service could be improved.
- what has been learned to reduce the risk of similar crashes reoccurring in the future.
- how you or your family could help the police or local authority raise awareness of the risks of road crashes.

Summary

Introduction

- Each day in the UK, five families suffer the shock of a sudden bereavement from a road crash.
- RoadPeace has a national helpline, a network of befrienders and local groups around the country. We can put you in contact with another person who has been bereaved by a road crash.

Road death investigation

Please remember that:

- National guidance is advisory. Each police force is independent and determines the resources allocated to all ongoing investigations.
- The Senior Investigation Officer is in charge of all collision investigation related decisions.
- The police will develop an investigation plan and record all key decisions in a policy file.
- The Family Liaison Officer is part of the investigation team and, while their role is to keep the family informed, they are also expected to keep a log and report back on anything they learn from the family.
- Bereaved families may also find it useful to keep a written record of the investigation progress and a log of the contacts with the police, coroner's officer, solicitors, CPS, etc.
- Each family has individual needs and expectations. Some want lots of information, others a summary and others none at all. There is no right and wrong, but the police may wait to be asked by the family before offering information.

At-scene investigation

You can ask about such key points as:

- Where the point of impact occurred and how they determined it.
- What the approach and impact vehicle speeds were estimated to be and how these were calculated.
- How the local traffic management system (traffic signals, signs, lights) was checked to see if it contributed to the crash.
- What tests, including breathalyser, were done on the driver(s) at the crash site.

Site investigation

You may be informed of the information collected on the:

- Number and type of collisions at the crash site in recent years.
- Maintenance record of the site.
- Any local concerns about speeding, visibility, etc.
- Any traffic signal, road layout or engineering issues.

Vehicle examination

You can ask about:

What will be done to determine if the vehicle condition contributed to the crash or the victim's death.

Witness identification and interview

You can ask:

- How witnesses are identified.
- Who is authorised to interview witnesses.
- If you can help with a media appeal for information or witnesses.

Driver investigation

You can ask:

- The results of any drink or drug test conducted.
- Insurance details.
- Why the driver(s) needs to be interviewed last.
- Whether checks on mobile phone records and eyesight were done.

Charging

You can ask:

- When the case file was passed to the CPS, and which criminal charge, if any, the police have recommended to the CPS.
- Which criminal charge, if any, the CPS will use in prosecuting a driver. This will have to pass their test of sufficient evidence and that of public interest. This should be clearly explained in the letter they send to you.
- That you are entitled to a meeting with the CPS where they will explain their charging decision.
- That you have the right to appeal the decision not to prosecute, regardless of whether it was made by the police or the CPS.

Bereaved family rights and recommended support services

You are entitled to:

- know the name of the driver(s) involved and their motor insurance policy details.
- ask questions at the inquest (but not those related to criminal or civil liability), meet with the CPS where they will explain their charging decision.
- receive information on local and national support services.
- be kept informed of the court case progress, including dates and times of court hearings.
- receive travel expenses for attending court if the driver has been charged with causing the death .

In addition, RoadPeace recommends the police also offer to:

- Escort you to the crash site and explain what is known about the circumstances and allow you to place flowers or a plaque, should you so desire.
- Meet with you before any inquest and show you the evidence, including photographs and witness statements.
- Notify you in writing of any key event, such as when they interview the driver or when they pass the file on to the CPS and what, if any, charging recommendation it includes.
- Provide a free copy of the investigation report and offer a meeting to review the case when the investigation is concluded.

Ensuring lessons are learned

After the police investigation has been completed, you should have the opportunity to ask:

- for a final meeting with the FLO and the RP Lead investigator to discuss any good practice or areas where the service could be improved.
- what has been learned to reduce the risk of similar crashes reoccurring in the future.
- How you or your family could help the police or local authority raise awareness of the risks of road crashes.

Please also know that RoadPeace wants to hear how this guide can be improved. We are interested in hearing what additional information should be included, if the wording or organisation can be improved, or any suggestions as to how to make it more useful for newly bereaved families.

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Appendix A: Glossary

Abbreviations and acronyms

ACPO	Association for Chief Police Officers
ANPR	Automatic Number Plate Recognition
APP	Authorised Professional Practice
CCTV	Closed Circuit Television
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service
DfT	Department for Transport
EDR	Event data recorder
FCI	Forensic Collision Investigator
FIT	Field Impairment Test
FLO	Family Liaison Officer
IPCC	Independent Police Complaints Commission
ITAI	Institute of Traffic Accident Investigators
MIB	Motor Insurers' Bureau
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
NPCC	National Police Chiefs Council
NPIA	National Police Improvement Agency
PACE	Police and Criminal Evidence Act
RDIM	Road Death Investigation Manual
RP	Roads Policing
SAI	Self Administered Interview
SIO	Senior Investigating Officer

Appendix B: Bereaved family checklist

Have you

- Clarified to your FLO which family member is the representative?
- Asked how many photos were taken and if you can see all of them?
- Asked how many witnesses were identified at the scene?
- Asked what more is being done to identify witnesses and how you can help?
- Asked what was checked with the driver(s) at the scene-breathalyser results are immediate, drug testing undertaken, mobile phone confiscated, eyesight checked?
- Requested to be informed when the police pass the file to the CPS and what their charging recommendation is?
- Obtained the contact and insurance details of the driver(s) involved.

If you are escorted to the site by the police, you may want to bring a camera and consider asking:

- How do they know where the impact occurred?
- The direction of vehicles and location of witnesses?
- What at the scene indicates the speed of the vehicles?
- Where do any skidmarks stop and start?
- Did the RP Lead investigator attend the scene? If so, when?
- Can they provide a sketch map with key locations marked?
- If you are allowed to leave flowers or a plaque at the site? This varies according to local highway authority policy.