



Model Guidelines for Connecticut Emergency Services UTV/ATV Operations

Model Procedures January 2025

**The Commission of Fire Prevention
and Control in Partnership with the
Connecticut Department of Energy
and Environment**



Emergency Services UTV/ATV Operations Model Procedures

Purpose

This [insert policy, procedure or guideline] establishes uniform guidelines for the safe and effective use of UTVs (Utility Terrain Vehicles) and ATVs (All Terrain Vehicles) by personnel during operations. The aim is to ensure the safety of personnel, protect department property, and maintain operational effectiveness in all terrains.

Policy Overview

Personnel using UTVs/ATVs for wildfire suppression, search and rescue, logistical support, and other approved activities must operate these vehicles responsibly, adhering to safety standards, vehicle manufacturer's guidelines, local laws, and department regulations. This [insert policy, procedure or guideline] does not supersede manufacturer's recommendations or requirements. All manufacturer's requirements and recommendations must be followed for each vehicle.

Procedures

Operator Requirements

- Operators must be at least 18 years of age.
- Operators must have a valid State driver's license.
- Operators must have received appropriate safety and operating training including a safety lecture, handling & maneuvering course, and light off road / obstacle course.
- Following training, trainees shall undergo a comprehensive knowledge and skill evaluation demonstrating competency prior to being authorized to operate without direct supervision by a qualified operator.
- Operators must be trained in utilizing UTV's and ATVs in emergency response and a working mindset, not recreational.
- Operators must have the maturity level capable of operating a modified UTV / ATV in a working mindset, and not a recreational mindset.

Helmet & PPE Requirements

- All operators and passengers must wear an approved helmet which meets or exceeds local, state and manufacturer's requirements while the vehicle is in operation. The helmet should also be acceptable and approved by the agency's insurance carrier.
- Structural and wildland helmets shall not be worn as head protection when operating or riding in a UTV / ATV.

- Helmets must be properly fitted, secured with a chin strap, and inspected regularly for damage.
- All occupants must wear eye protection if helmet is not equipped with a face shield.
- All occupants must have long pants & closed toe footwear.
- This PPE for vehicle operation may not be the mission required PPE. Mission specific PPE may need to be carried and used separately.

Safety Requirements

- UTVs equipped with seatbelts must be worn and securely fastened by all occupants at all times when the vehicle is in motion.
- UTVs not equipped with seatbelts shall not be used for work or emergency purpose.
- Occupants shall not ride in positions that do not have a seatbelt or are not intended for passenger use including, but no limited to; the rear cargo area, any bed skid modifications, the roof, the hood, or standing on running boards.
- ATVs, lacking seatbelts, require extra attention to balance and positioning for stability and safety.
- All safety equipment present on the UTV/ATV must be utilized, to include hard/soft doors, roll bars, equipment tie-downs, compartment latches, wind screens, etc.
- UTV/ATVs with the ability to pull trailers shall stay within the manufacturer's load limits.
- UTVs with portable water tanks shall consider the weight of the water and associated equipment when calculating the capacity and ability of the UTV to operate safely (see Section 4).
- UTV's and ATV's shall be equipped with a minimum 2.5lb. ABC rated fire extinguisher.
- UTV's and ATV's shall be equipped with a self-use first aid kit.
- UTV's and ATV's should be equipped with basic self-recovery tools such as winches & tow straps when possible.
- Additional safety equipment may include multi-tool, GPS or CAD enabled Tablet, tire pressure gauge, and 2-way radio.

Reasonable Speed

- Operators must always maintain a reasonable speed, considering terrain, visibility, operational demands, and manufacturers recommendations.
- UTV/ATV speed should not exceed 25 mph unless a situation warrants faster travel (e.g., emergency response in clear, safe conditions).

- Operators must slow to walking speed near other personnel, vehicles (including passing other UTV/ATVs), or hazards, including smoke conditions and low light levels.
- Speed limits off road or while negotiating obstacles will be greatly reduced and in accordance with manufactures recommendations to ensure the maximum possible safety.

Terrain Management

- Operators must assess the terrain and adapt driving techniques accordingly.
- Operators shall require personnel to dismount and assist in evaluating and negotiating obstacles where possible including steep terrain, traveling over obstacles, fording through water, backing up and moving through large crowds.
- Steep inclines/declines: Engage lower gears, maintain control, and avoid sudden braking. Operators shall dismount and evaluate the slope prior to attempting to negotiate it.
- Rocky or uneven surfaces: Proceed slowly, avoiding unnecessary impact or rollover risks.
- Wet or muddy conditions: Evaluate traction and avoid deep mud or water unless deemed passable.
- All operators should familiarize themselves with the terrain before operation, if feasible, using maps or reconnaissance.

Pre-Operation Checklist

- Inspect the vehicle for mechanical issues (e.g., brakes, tires, wheels, fluid levels, controls, cables, chain, chassis, winch and lights).
- Ensure all safety equipment, including helmets, first aid kits, fire extinguishers, and communication devices, are on board.

Incident Reporting

- All accidents, injuries, or near-misses must be reported immediately to the chain of command and documented per department policy.
- A post-incident review shall be conducted to prevent future occurrences.

Operator Responsibility

All personnel operating UTVs/ATVs must exercise due diligence to minimize risks to themselves, their passengers, and their surroundings. Reckless or negligent operation will result in disciplinary action per department policy.

Policy Review and Updates

This [insert policy, procedure or guideline] shall be reviewed annually and updated as necessary to incorporate advances in technology, safety practices, and operational feedback.

Effective Date: [Insert Date]

Reviewed By: [Insert Reviewer Name/Position]

Approval Authority: [Insert Approving Authority Name/Title]