



SAN ANTONIO POLICE DEPARTMENT GENERAL MANUAL



Procedure 319 – Civilian Observer Program

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Forms Referenced in Procedure:	SAPD Form #166-AR SAPD Form #166-COC	Related Procedures:	None

.01 INTRODUCTION

This procedure establishes guidelines for civilians to obtain authorization to ride as observers with San Antonio police officers in police vehicles and outlines the responsibilities for civilians and officers that are involved in the Civilian Observer Program.

.02 CIVILIAN OBSERVER PROGRAM

- A. The Civilian Observer Program is a program which allows and encourages civilians to ride as observers with San Antonio police officers to get a better understanding of police work and also to create a spirit of involvement in the area of community policing.
- B. The Civilian Observer Program is administered and coordinated by the Station Commander having command authority over the service area where the civilian observer will be assigned during the ride. Station commanders may designate Assistant Station Commanders or Unit Directors to assist with coordinating and implementing the Civilian Observer Program. Station Commanders should consider potential impact to operations and civilian observers should generally be limited to observing for half of the officer's shift. Outside agency law enforcement and civilian observers approved through the Office of the Chief may be approved to observe for the entire officer's shift.
- C. Any civilian who has received written authorization on SAPD Form #166-AR, *Civilian Observer Authorization and Release*, may participate in the Civilian Observer Program. The following criteria will assist in determining whether to allow an individual to ride and this may include:
 1. Sworn police officers from other jurisdictions, military personnel working in law enforcement related areas or individuals who have been referred by the Chief's Office, Mayor's Office, City Manager's Office or related City departments;
 2. Professors or students enrolled in a criminal justice program from an institute of higher education, with proof of enrollment in the program;
 3. Members of the Department authorized by their supervisors to assist in understanding police operations within the Department (Dispatchers, 911 Clerks, Crime Scene Investigators, or Police Service Agents); and
 4. Citizens completing training in the Citizens Police Academy, Cellular on Patrol, Volunteers in Policing, Victims Advocacy, and Family Assistance Crisis Team are entitled to a minimum of one ride. Individuals who are very active in the above listed programs may be authorized to ride more than one time at the discretion of the Chief's Office.

.03 TERMINOLOGY *(For specific use within this procedure, see Glossary)*

Civilian	Firearm	Observer
Ride Along	Weapon	

.04 AUTHORIZATION PROCESS

- A. Approval for any civilian to ride as an observer in a police vehicle must be obtained in advance of each ride by contacting, in person, one of the following:



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1. The station commander, assistant station commander or unit director of the service area or unit where the civilian is requesting to ride;
 2. The Commander of the Police Training Academy; or
 3. The Office of the Chief.
- B. Before authorization is granted for a civilian to ride as an observer, the civilian must read and agree to the requirements set forth in Section .05 of this procedure.
- C. If the civilian agrees to the requirements in Section .05 of this procedure, the civilian will:
1. Complete SAPD Form #166-AR and be issued a copy;
 2. Be instructed on the requirements of the Civilian Observer Program.
- D. Prior to approving the civilian to ride as an observer in a police vehicle, the approving authority shall:
1. Conduct a search in the Civilian Observer Program database (\\fscommon\civilian_observer_log\) to check if the civilian has been a rider in the past. If the civilian has been a rider previously, the Office of the Chief will determine if the civilian will be approved to ride again.
 2. Complete a local criminal history (PMNI) and warrant check (PGW1) and approve or disapprove the ride.
 3. Inform the civilian whether the ride is approved, schedule the ride and provide the civilian with a completed copy of SAPD Form #166-AR.
 4. Deliver a copy of SAPD Form #166-AR and a copy of the civilian's driver's license or identification card to the supervisor of the officer who will be assigned the civilian observer rider.
 5. Ensure that the individual being permitted to ride will not be assigned to ride with relatives on the Department, including spouses.
 6. Individuals permitted to ride should not be in a physical or mental condition that would hinder the officer from performing their duties or jeopardize the safety of the rider and/or the officer.

.05 REQUIREMENTS FOR CIVILIAN OBSERVERS

- A. Release of Liability (SAPD Form #166-AR and Criminal History / Warrant Check)
1. The civilian observer must be at least eighteen (18) years of age or older and have a valid driver's license or identification. Active members of the Department's Explorer Program are exempt from the eighteen (18) years of age requirement but must meet all requirements of the Explorer Program's General Manual, and approved by the station's Explorer Program coordinator prior to any civilian explorer observer ride. All arrangements and required paperwork for members of the Explorer Program will be handled by the post Supervisor (SAPD Sergeant) or the Post Advisor (SAPD Officer) of the respective Explorer Post. The Post Supervisor or Post Advisor will ensure that all requirements are met and all necessary paperwork and information is provided to the Station Commander, Assistant Station Commander, or Unit/Shift Director of the service area or Unit/Shift where the explorer is requesting to ride.
 2. Prior to a civilian riding with an officer, the civilian must read, understand, and complete SAPD Form #166-AR.
 3. By completing SAPD Form #166-AR, the civilian authorizes and consents to a criminal history / warrant check. A local criminal history (PMNI) and a warrant (PGW1) check will be conducted on the civilian.
- B. Reporting For The Ride Along



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1. The civilian observer reports to the designated station or unit fifteen (15) minutes prior to the start of the ride.
2. The civilian observer must present their drivers license or identification, along with their copy of SAPD Form #166-AR, to the supervisor who is in charge of assigning an officer for the ride. The supervisor verifies the civilian's identification against the information on SAPD Form #166-AR.
3. The supervisor issues the civilian observer a SAPD Form 166-COC, *Civilian Observer Identification Card*, and requires that the civilian wear the identification card along with maintaining a copy of SAPD Form #166-AR with them throughout the duration of the ride.
4. The supervisor introduces the civilian to the officer they will ride with and informs the civilian that the officer or the supervisor may terminate the ride at any time.
5. The civilian observer may terminate the ride at anytime as long as it does not interfere with the officer's immediate responsibilities.

C. Dress Code

1. The civilian observer shall wear comfortable, casual, and conservative clothing (i.e., pants and shirt for men, skirt/pants and blouse for women).
2. An observer dressed in inappropriate clothing will not be allowed to ride.

D. Conduct During Ride

1. The observer, for his own safety, will follow the instructions of the officer at all times.
2. Conversation with the officer is encouraged as long as it does not interfere with the officer's duties.
3. Firearms or other types of weapons will not be carried by any observer. This includes observers who have a concealed handgun permit and law enforcement personnel from outside agencies.
4. The observer may carry a flashlight, note pad and other equipment that is approved by the officer.
5. The use of audio and video recording devices (including camera phones) during the duration of the ride along is prohibited, unless prior authorization is received from the Police Media Services Detail.

E. Conclusion Of The Ride Along

1. At the conclusion of the ride along the observer returns SAPD Form #166-COC and their copy of SAPD Form #166-AR to the assigned officer.
2. The assigned officer returns SAPD Form #166-COC and SAPD Form #166-AR to a supervisor who forwards it to the station commander.

.06 STATION COMMANDER RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. Station commanders ensure that the Civilian Observer Program is implemented and administered according to this procedure.
- B. Station commanders will forward the original SAPD Form #166-AR and a copy of the civilian observer's driver's license or identification to the Office of the Chief. This information will be entered into the Civilian Observer Program database which will be maintained by the Office of the Chief.



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.07 OFFICER RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. Instruct the civilian observer on any special requirements prior to the start of the ride along, including:
 - 1. Actions to take during dangerous or emergency situations;
 - 2. When to get in or out of the police vehicle when responding to routine calls.
- B. Any incident involving the civilian observer is documented in a written report by the officer and is routed through the officer's chain of command to The Office of the Chief.