



Vehicle Usage Policy

Contents

1. Purpose	1
2. Applicability	1
3. Policy	1
4. Policy Non-Compliance	5
5. Audit	5
6. Definitions	5
7. Background	6

1. **Purpose**

This policy establishes uniform vehicle use practices and requirements for Buncombe County employees, as well as partners and affiliated agencies that operate County-owned or leased vehicles to conduct County business. Unless stated otherwise, this policy applies to vehicles owned by the County, vehicles leased or rented by the County, as well as personal vehicles, to ensure safe driving and efficient use of public property and/or resources.

2. **Applicability**

This policy applies to all Buncombe County departments, employees, partners, and affiliated agencies. Where there is conflict with any department-specific policy, this document will supersede. This policy does not apply to elected officials; however, they may elect to follow this policy by providing a written statement.

3. **Policy**

3.1. Use of Vehicles for County Business

- 3.1.1. All vehicle operators must be properly licensed and insured to operate a motor vehicle to conduct business on behalf of Buncombe County.
- 3.1.2. Vehicle operators are responsible for ensuring their vehicle is in good working condition according to the vehicle manual.
- 3.1.3. County vehicles may be assigned to one or more vehicle operators for their primary use for County business and obligations. At the end of the work day, all County vehicles are to be parked in their assigned parking area unless otherwise authorized by the respective Department Director.
- 3.1.4. Individuals driving County vehicles must be at least eighteen (18) years of age.
- 3.1.5. Vehicle operators assigned County-owned vehicles are expected to maintain the interior and exterior cleanliness of the vehicle.
- 3.1.6. When fueling vehicles, vehicle operators are expected to select the lowest available fuel grade and are encouraged to obtain fuel from the County Garage Fueling Station if possible. Fuel-specific credit cards (WEX Cards) are issued with each vehicle, or can be checked out from Finance or HHS. County issued procurement cards should not be used for fuel. Additionally, vehicle operators should reference Buncombe County's Emergency Fuel Conservation Policy as well as the

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Procurement Card Policy. Exceptions for fuel grade should receive Department Director approval.

3.2. Driver's Responsibilities

- 3.2.1. Vehicle operators are expected to operate all vehicles in a safe and courteous manner. Operators will obey all traffic laws, to include the wearing of a seat belt at all times.
- 3.2.2. Violations, citations, fines, and other actions taken by any enforcement agency against a vehicle operator while operating a motor vehicle are the responsibility of the employee and may be cause for disciplinary action by the County.
- 3.2.3. All employees are subject to annual reviews of their Motor Vehicle Record (MVR) by the Safety Officer. Upon request, all employees must provide a copy of their current license to the safety officer and complete any driver-related training.
- 3.2.4. Employees are required to notify their Department Director within one (1) business day of any change in their driving status, which includes reporting all vehicle accidents that occur while conducting County business. This includes but is not limited to fines, citations, suspensions, and revocations. Driving for County business with a suspended driver's license is prohibited. Failure to notify the Department Director may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.
- 3.2.5. In the case of an accident involving any level of damage while conducting County business, the employee driving the vehicle shall immediately (or as soon as practically possible) notify their supervisor. When the accident involves another vehicle, involves any property damage or causes injury the appropriate Law Enforcement Agency should be notified to obtain a full accident report.
- 3.2.6. The County will not be responsible for any increase in the employee's automobile insurance premium as a result of an accident or fines, as well as any increases as a result of carrying adequate coverage for business use.
- 3.2.7. Driving after the consumption of alcohol or while under the influence of any controlled substance is prohibited per the Drug-Free Workplace Policy.
- 3.2.8. The use of tobacco products or E-Cigarettes/vaping products are prohibited in a County-owned vehicle.
- 3.2.9. Possession, transportation or consumption of alcohol or illegal drugs by anyone in the vehicle is prohibited per the Drug-Free Workplace policy. The exceptions are emergency and law enforcement personnel who may transport lawfully confiscated items as required and within the scope and course of their official duties or residents with known or unknown substances.

3.3. Distracted Driving

Buncombe County has a vital interest in maintaining a safe, healthy and efficient working environment for its employees. This includes a safe and appropriate environment while traveling on County business. Distracted driving is a serious safety risk, not only to the driver, but also to other occupants in the vehicle, other vehicles on the road and pedestrians. In order to reduce the risks associated with distracted driving, certain conduct is prohibited while driving a County-owned motor vehicle or while driving a personal vehicle while on County business, including but not limited to:

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- Manually enter multiple letters or text in an electronic device or mobile telephone as a means of communicating with another person;
- Distractions by passengers;
- Distractions caused by eating or drinking while driving;
- Operating laptops, tablets, portable media devices, and GPS devices; and
- Reading maps or any type of document, printed or electronic.

Drivers must pull over safely to the side of the road or another safe location before reading messages, returning calls, text messaging, emailing, reading maps for directions, or programming/resetting GPS devices.

Exceptions. The provisions of this section do not apply to:

- a) any of the following while in the performance of their official duties:
 - a law enforcement officer;
 - a member of a fire department; or
 - the operator of a public or private ambulance.
- b) the use of hands-free technology

3.4. Use of County Vehicles

- 3.4.1. Per North Carolina General Statute 14-247, personal use of County-owned or leased vehicles is prohibited.
- 3.4.2. Per North Carolina General Statute 143-341(8)i7a, County vehicles are to be used for official County business only and shall not be used for the convenience of the employee regarding transportation needs or other non-business-related activities.
- 3.4.3. The County acknowledges that its employees may need at times, to keep personal items and information stored in or on County-owned property. However, due to security and accountability concerns, personal items/ information stored on or in a County-owned vehicle are subject to inspection at any time without any prior notice. This includes the installation of a GPS device to track the whereabouts of the County-owned vehicle.
- 3.4.4. When conducting County business in the field, County vehicles may be used to travel to a nearby restaurant for lunch where the cost-benefit in travel time to the work quarters for a personal vehicle would not be in the best interest of the County.
- 3.4.5. Each Department Director will provide the General Services and Finance Departments with a list of County vehicles assigned for overnight use on an annual basis. The list must include the vehicle number, driver's name, driver's license number, and valid business reason for overnight use.
- 3.4.6. Department Directors should notify General Services and Finance of any operator changes to assigned vehicles within five (5) business days.
- 3.4.7. It is the responsibility of the vehicle operator to ensure County-owned vehicles are serviced as-needed. This includes notifying the County Garage (or HHS Operations for Health and Human Services vehicles) of any issues needing repair as well as ensuring the vehicle is scheduled for regular maintenance.

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3.4.8. In the event of vehicle malfunction, vehicle operators should follow the steps provided in the vehicle glove box for assistance.

3.5. Use of Personal Vehicles

3.5.1. Employees using a personal vehicle for County business will be reimbursed for mileage pursuant to the Travel Policy. Per IRS Publication 5137: “A standard mileage rate is considered to cover all expenses of operating a vehicle, including insurance, maintenance, tires, oil and so on.”

3.5.2. Operators using a personal vehicle for County business should carry adequate personal vehicle liability insurance as required by law and provide proof of such insurance to the Risk Manager. All County officials and employees using a personal vehicle for County-related business are expected to consult with their insurance provider to ensure they are appropriately covered for business use.

3.5.3. Employees using a personal vehicle for County business must ensure that the vehicle is inspected annually, and that the vehicle is in safe operating condition with no pre-existing damage.

3.5.4. The County assumes no responsibility for accidents and damages to privately owned vehicles.

3.6. Overnight Vehicle Assignment

3.6.1. The County’s goal is to only authorize the assignment of an overnight (take-home) vehicle when the best interest of the public is served by providing County employees with transportation according to the criteria listed in this section. The assignment of a county vehicle is neither a privilege nor a right of any county employee. Assignment of a county vehicle should not be made based on employee merit or employee status.

3.6.2. Authorization for continual use of County vehicles for commuting purposes may be granted by the Department Director to specified positions based on the following criteria:

3.6.2.1. The position requires work in the field, away from a physical office, more than 75% of the position’s total work time **AND** the position starts the day from home directly to the field 3 (three) or more days per week **AND** special equipment is needed that cannot reasonably be kept in a personal vehicle, **OR**

3.6.2.2. The position responds to after-hours business calls at least 1 (one) time per week **AND** the position is expected to respond to after-hours business calls within 30 (thirty) minutes **AND** special equipment is needed that cannot reasonably be kept in a personal vehicle

3.6.3. Consistent with policies and procedures for State-owned take-home vehicles, employees assigned County-owned vehicles must reimburse the County for using these vehicles for commuting (personal use) to and from work through payroll deduction. This rate shall be set at the IRS fringe benefit rate, which also satisfies Internal Revenue Service (IRS) fringe benefit requirements. As a result, no additional attributed income is added to the employee’s gross income for taxation purposes. If an employee is 100% telecommuting, whose principal place of

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business is their home, and utilizes a County vehicle in accordance with this policy, the employee may be exempt from paying the IRS fringe benefit rate.

- 3.6.4. Reimbursement will be made by payroll deduction.
- 3.6.5. Certain take-home vehicles are excluded from the commuting reimbursement requirement. These exceptions are consistent with those as outlined in IRS Publication 15-B, Employer's Tax Guide to Fringe Benefits.
- 3.6.6. If more than one employee is required to commute in the same County-owned or leased vehicle for an official government purpose, each employee will be charged a per day commuting charge via payroll deduction, based upon IRS requirements.
- 3.6.7. Assigned take-home vehicles must always stay within Buncombe County except when performing work for County Emergency Services. This specific exception is for vehicles used for Emergency Services when the assigned employee is schedule on-call for emergency response.
- 3.6.8. Employees permitted to take a County-owned vehicle home (commute) from their workstation may do so for job-related reasons and not as a compensatory measure.
- 3.6.9. Employees must be able to reasonably keep the assigned take-home vehicle at their home or at a County approved location after work hours.
- 3.6.10. If an employee with an assigned take-home vehicle is on a leave of absence for longer than 5 working days, the County-owned vehicle should be parked at a County-owned facility until the employee resumes the duties assigned to their position.

3.7. Occasional Overnight Vehicle Assignment

Occasional overnight usage of County-owned vehicles is permitted. Such occasional usage of County vehicles may occur when an employee conducts County business away from the employee's normal place of work, and outside an employee's normally scheduled work day. Other types of occasional overnight usage is permitted when the following conditions exist:

- 3.7.1. Inclement weather conditions: When employee is on-call and has primary responsibility to respond.
- 3.7.2. Emergency preparedness or seasonal assignment: County-owned vehicle is permitted when an employee is on-call and vehicle is taken home less than 4 (four) times per quarter on average.

3.8. Vehicle Need

As a need arises for a new vehicle, Department Directors should reference the Sustainable Fleet Policy and Procedures for the appropriate steps and guidelines.

4. Policy Non-Compliance

Employees willfully violating the terms and conditions of this policy may be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

5. Audit

All policies for Buncombe County may be subject to audit or review as outlined in the [Internal Auditor's Statement](#).

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6. Definitions

- 6.1. Vehicle – cars, trucks, boats owned, leased, or rented by Buncombe County, or personal vehicles used by employees or contractors in conducting Buncombe County business.
- 6.2. Vehicle Operator – any person operating a vehicle for Buncombe County business operations. This may include a County employee, a partner, or an affiliated agency.

7. Approval and Revision History

Policy Origination Date:	2/21/2012
Requires Board Approval:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Board Approval Date:	Click for Date
Revision History (Dates & Changes):	10/5/20: Added distracted driver language 9/23/21: edited verbiage, aligned to sustainable fleet policy and procedures 5/23/22: edited to include revised overnight vehicle criteria and language from Legal and Risk department 7/25/22: added seat belt language

8. Background

This policy should be adhered to in conjunction with all other Buncombe County policies, including the Drug-Free Workplace Policy

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