



# Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory

Fred Lawrence Whipple Observatory

## **Vehicle Operator's Guide**

### **Are you authorized to drive an Observatory vehicle?**

If you are a Smithsonian staff member, have read the FLWO *Vehicle Operator's Guide*, and provided a copy of your driver's license with a signed FLWO Driver's Statement to the Facility Manager, then you are an authorized driver. This authority also applies to predocs, postdocs, graduate students, and interns who are supported with SAO funding.

If you are an employee of a collaborating institution or university, you must be appointed as a Smithsonian "No-Fee Consultant." You must read the FLWO *Vehicle Operator's Guide*, and provide a copy of your driver's license with a signed FLWO Driver's Statement to the Facility Manager.

\* (*Smithsonian Staff Handbook* 1500, Transmittal 1, dated September 1, 1992 and supplemented by *SAO Policy and Procedures* of October 16, 2000.)

### **Mt. Hopkins Road**

The FLWO road is a mostly unpaved, single-lane mountain road that must be driven with caution and awareness. Because of the nature of the Observatory's geography, an ability to drive on unimproved mountain roads is essential to any effective use of the facilities.

The 17 kilometers from the Administrative Complex to the Observatory Ridge is defined by the Forest Service as a "fair weather, single-lane, access road." If weather conditions warrant, the road will be closed to all personnel and visitors at the discretion of the Facility Manager.

The road below the gate is open to the public, so never assume your presence is known to all traffic even with the use of VHF radios.

### **Do you know the lock combination for the road gates?**

The Administrative Complex driveway, motor pool entrance and Observatory access road at the Ridge all have gates that are operated by entering a code on a keypad. Make certain you know the current code and whether or not any additional characters have to be entered to open the gates. The code is required for entrance only; a sensor in the pavement will detect your vehicle when you pull up to exit and open the gate automatically.

### **Motor Pool Operations at FLWO**

FLWO maintains an automotive shop responsible for preventive maintenance, repair, renovation, and fueling of vehicles.



The motor pool has two categories of vehicles:

- 1) **GSA leased** vehicles (license plate begins with a "G") that are primarily provided for shuttling scientists and daytime staff between the Administrative Complex and mountain, and
- 2) **Smithsonian owned** vehicles (license plate has "SI" on it) that include renovated cars, trucks and heavy, mobile equipment initially obtained from military bases. Many of these vehicles are located

on the mountain for Observatory users to drive between buildings while other vehicles are used solely by the mountain support staff.

GSA leased vehicles are always parked in secured areas overnight such as inside a chain link fence at the Administrative Complex. For vehicles parked on the mountain, the Observatory grounds are secured with a locked gate to prevent outsiders any access.

All GSA leased vehicles have a permanently, mounted VHF radio. When driving any other vehicle, make use of a hand-held radio available at the Administrative Complex.

## Your Responsibilities as an Operator of a SI Vehicle

### DO

- \* **Check** the gas gauge after starting the vehicle to verify that there is sufficient fuel.
- \* **Fasten** your seat belt.
- \* **Use** a VHF **radio**—it should be on Channel 1 (or "normal"). Borrow a hand-held radio if there is none in the vehicle.
- \* **Announce** your departure from the summit, ridge or Administrative Complex to alert other traffic.
- \* **Observe** kilometer markers on the road so you can announce your location to other traffic.
- \* **Check on road conditions** during rain or snowstorms. Ask staff at the Administrative Complex during business hours. During non-business hours, call 520-879-4408 to listen to a recorded message. At all times, use common sense regarding a trip up or down the mountain.
- \* **Use 4 - wheel drive vehicles** during continuous, heavy rainfall or snow storms. **Make certain you know how to operate the particular 4WD system the vehicle has.** Ask staff or read the instructions in the vehicle.
- \* **Drive at a safe speed.** Above the Administrative Complex, the speed limit is 20 mph. This is the maximum speed on straight parts of the road under ideal conditions. When driving around curves or under bad road conditions, the maximum safe speed may be 5 mph. Also, stay on the right side of the road.
- \* **Give the right-of-way to large trucks** hauling equipment or materials regardless of their direction. Use the radio to communicate and offer to park and wait at a wide area in the road.



- \* **Make an effort to car pool** with other scientists and staff who need to travel to and from the mountain. In particular, adhere to evening shuttle times from the Administrative Complex to the mountain. Shuttle times are posted on the board in the lunchroom at the Administrative Complex.
- \* **Use lower gears when driving downhill** to prevent needless wear on the brakes and to keep them from overheating. If you are using the brake frequently when driving downhill, shift to a lower gear and slow down.
- \* **Leave all vehicles UNLOCKED WITH THE KEYS IN THE IGNITION.** Other observatory guests and mountain support crew may need access to vehicles. During snowstorms, vehicles may need to be moved for snow plowing. You can leave a note in a vehicle if you have a special need to retain it, for example, departing the mountain to meet a taxi at the Administrative Complex.
- \* **Complain** to the Facility Manager, 879-4403, if you ride with or observe an irresponsible driver. Names of staff or visitors making reports about reckless drivers will be kept confidential.
- \* **Report any problems** with vehicles to the motor pool, 879-4410.

## DO NOT

- **DO NOT SMOKE.** Smoking is not permitted in any SI/FLWO vehicle or building.
- **DO NOT DRINK** alcoholic beverages before or while operating any Observatory vehicle or equipment. (This includes dinners at meetings and conferences.)
- **DO NOT Use the vehicle for private business, personal errands, or recreation.** Avoid creating any perception of misuse. Reported incidents of misuse often result in disciplinary actions.
- **DO NOT** Transport members of your family, personal friends, or non-Government employees in the vehicle without specific permission from the FLWO Facility Manager or designee.
- **DO NOT** Use the vehicle for transportation to or from work or park it at your residence without valid written authorization.
- **DO NOT lock vehicles and do not remove the keys** when vehicles are on mountain or at Administrative Complex. Avoid a dead battery by removing the key and leaving it in plain sight on dash or in cup holder or partially re-insert in ignition switch. **DO LOCK** vehicles when parked at other locations such as Green Valley or Tucson.
- **DO NOT** assume that everyone traveling on Mt. Hopkins road has a VHF radio. Mt. Hopkins Road is within the Coronado National Forest and is open to anyone up to the Observatory's locked gate.





## Shuttles

Shuttle vehicles are available for transportation between the Administrative Complex and the mountain at the listed times. DO NOT leave the Office before the listed time. Plan ahead and take one of the regularly scheduled shuttles.

### Day Shuttle (Monday – Friday)

Leave Office	Shuttle
7:30 a.m.	MMT shuttle
8:30 a.m.	Ridge Shuttle
11 a.m.	11 o'clock shuttle

### Evening Shuttle (Daily)

Leave Office		Leave Office	
January	4:15 pm	July	6:15 pm
February	4:45 pm	August	5:45 pm
March	5:15 pm	September	5:15 pm
April	5:45 pm	October	4:45 pm
May	5:45 pm	November	4:15 pm
June	6:15 pm	December	4:15 pm

Personal or rental cars may be driven to the telescopes, weather and road conditions permitting. Check road conditions and weather forecast with the office first. Remember that bad weather can trap an ordinary car on the mountain. Beware of the last 400 feet of road to the MMT. If your car has had trouble making the climb to this point, do not attempt the last grade. Instead, park at the Bowl and take one of the Observatory vehicles provided for inter-building transportation.



## **What to Do if You Have an Accident**

### **Take Necessary Emergency Action**

Accidents happen. If you are involved in an accident, try to stay calm and take the following actions:

- **DETERMINE IF SOMEONE IS INJURED.** Radio to the Administrative Complex during business hours. (During non-business hours, radio to the mountain top and call on a cell phone if available. In case of any injuries, call 911 on your cell phone).

**Do not sign or make a statement as to responsibility.**

**Get the facts including registration, permit, insurance, local details, and witnesses. (See Section – Get the Facts – below.)**

- **Complete the Accident Report Kit.**
- **Notify county authorities, as required by law.**

### **Do Not Sign Or Make A Statement As To Responsibility**

Cooperate with the local sheriff. However, any formal statement should be made to your supervisor or to the Government investigator. Be courteous. Do not engage in arguments at the accident scene.

You may provide your valid motor vehicle operator's license or permit information if requested by police, investigating officials or other drivers involved in the accident. Be aware that registration, licensing, and insurance requirements differ from requirements for privately owned vehicles. For instance, all SI/FLWO vehicles are not insured because the Federal Government is a self-insurer. The FLWO staff will be able to assist you if you have questions.

### **Get The Facts**

Having all the facts is essential when reporting an accident. The best time to collect these facts is at the scene of the accident after all necessary emergency actions have been taken. At this time, witnesses are present and your memory is fresh. The following facts are crucial and will be needed when filling out the accident report described in the next section.

- **Registration information on all other vehicles involved;**
- **Permit and insurance information from all other drivers involved;**
- **Names and addresses of all persons involved in the accident and the extent of injuries;**
- **Details on the location, time, measurements, weather, and damage;**
- **Names and addresses of any witnesses. (Third party witnesses are most helpful.)**



## Accident Report Kit

For your convenience, a kit containing required forms for reporting a vehicle accident is located inside the glove compartment. Report your accident using this form to the FLWO Facility Manager and your supervisor within 24 hours after the accident. Your agency is responsible for submission of all required forms if you are injured and unable to comply.

- SI Form 3712, **Vehicle Accident Report** – Vehicle operator must complete this form at the time and scene of the accident, if possible. The form needs to be completed for all FLWO vehicle accidents.
- Standard Form 91, **Motor Vehicle Accident Report** – This form needs to be completed for all GSA leased vehicles at FLWO in addition to SI Form 3712.
- Standard Form 94, **Statement of Witness**

NOTE: Form CA-1, **Federal Employee's Notice of Traumatic Injury and Claim for Continuation of Pay/Compensation**, is not included in this kit, but is available from the FLWO office, or from your supervisor. This form is filled out, if applicable, by the injured party or by someone acting on the person's behalf and submitted to their immediate supervisor within 24 hours.

Form CA-1 should only be completed by Federal and Trust fund employees of the Smithsonian Institution and visiting employees of other Federal agencies. Visiting scientists need to contact their respective institutions.

Remember that these forms usually can be avoided by slowing down and paying attention as you drive the Mt. Hopkins Road.

Created: February 2005.  
Updated: May 2012