

Some Macon crash reports can be bought online

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Read more here: <http://www.macon.com/2012/01/01/1845378/some-crash-reports-can-be-bought.html#storylink=misearch#storylink=cpy>

Involved in a traffic accident in Macon?

There's a chance the wreck report can be printed from the convenience of a home computer.

Macon police are using free software to participate in the Georgia Electronic Accident Reporting System on a pilot basis. Their hope is to provide copies of traffic accident reports more conveniently and to reduce the volume of people waiting for services at the department's Central Records office.

Four Macon police officers started using the software to submit reports in November, police said.

The software is "user friendly," but officers still must write reports by hand at the scene of an accident. When they return to their squad room, they then fill in the computer form, police Lt. Wilton Collins said.

Chief Mike Burns said the department hopes to use special purpose local option sales tax funds to purchase laptop computers for patrol cars so officers can write reports while on the road and submit them for a supervisor's approval.

To purchase a report online, a person must visit BuyCrash.com and enter the date of the crash, an agency ID number provided by police, the case number and a last name, said Sgt. Nathan Sprague.

A credit or debit card is required for payment and then the report can be printed. Each report costs \$15.

For reports not available online or for people who would rather obtain a report in person, they must go to the police Central Records office on First Street during business hours, pay \$5 and show a photo ID, Sprague said.

"We do not fax," he said.

Although clerks at Central Records try to serve customers as quickly as possible, there are times when people have to wait in line, Sprague said.

"It can get busy," he said.

If people start using the online system to get wreck reports, clerks will have more time to fingerprint customers, perform background checks and make copies of other reports provided to the public by the office, Sprague said.

All traffic accident reports generated by Georgia law enforcement agencies are submitted to the Georgia Department of Transportation's crash reporting unit. In a cost-saving move, the unit started outsourcing much of its work in 2009 to Indiana-based Open Portal Solutions Inc., said Norm Cressman, GDOT's crash data reporting manager.

Prior to the outsourcing, state employees were manually inputting data from crash reports submitted on paper, he said.

About half the reports submitted still come in paper form, while the rest come in electronically either through the free state software or other report writing software programs, Cressman said.

The Georgia State Patrol and some metro Atlanta law enforcement agencies were among the first to begin submitting reports electronically, Cressman said.

"Macon and Bibb (County) have been high on our wish list for a while" due to the number of accident reports the agencies generate, he said.

In 2010, Macon police reported more than 4,100 vehicle crashes on public highways, and Bibb County deputies reported more than 1,500 crashes, according to state data.

The Monroe County Sheriff's Office and Milledgeville Police Department also are in the early stages of using the software to submit reports.

In Monroe County, about two dozen deputies have been using the GEARS software for the past three weeks to input reports. The sheriff's office plans to test the software in a patrol car in the next few weeks, Lt. Brad Freeman said.

To contact writer Amy Leigh Womack, call 744-4398.

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