

Improving Communications At The Traffic Stop

(NAPS)—Traffic law enforcement is a proven method of increasing pedestrian safety, and seat belt, child safety seat and helmet use; reducing the incidence of impaired and aggressive driving; and increasing the apprehension of dangerous criminals.

In recent years, the public has been made aware of incidents that have occurred between citizens and law enforcement during traffic stops. Most of these incidents were positive and did much to advance the public's perception of law enforcement. Some incidents were negative, disturbing, and created public mistrust.

The following tips discuss what is expected of citizens and law enforcement during a traffic stop. Understanding what is expected from both parties improves communication, helps to reduce anxieties and improves the public's understanding about the need for traffic law enforcement. Improved communication is also the first step in eliminating community-based divisiveness and creating community-based partnerships.

If you are a motorist:

- Invoke the "Golden Rule." Treat the officer the way you would like to be treated.

- Remember that you are required to cooperate with all reasonable requests that law enforcement personnel make.

- If an officer signals for you to stop, remain calm and pull over safely.

- Be prepared to produce your driver's license and other documents, based on the laws in your jurisdiction.

- Remain in the vehicle unless the officer tells you otherwise.

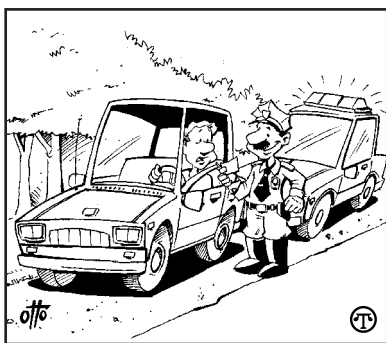
- Keep your hands visible.

- If you are stopped by a non-uniformed officer in an unmarked vehicle, you can ask the officer for identification.

- If you believe the reason for the stop is vague or unclear, you can ask the officer the details.

- If you are uncomfortable about stopping because an area is deserted or not well-lit, explain this to the officer and ask if you can proceed to a more populated or better illuminated place.

- Procedural questions and complaints about an officer's treatment of you can be forwarded to the officer's supervisor.



Traffic stops can be more congenial when both parties understand and respect each other.

- Don't speed, drive aggressively or drive while you are impaired. Always wear your seat belt and correctly buckle up any children who are riding with you. Yield to pedestrians when they have the right-of-way. If you follow all traffic laws, you reduce your chances that the police will stop you.

- Try to find the "positive" in the traffic stop. Use the information you have received to make yourself a better motorist.

If you are a law enforcement officer:

- Invoke the "Golden Rule." Treat the motorist the way you would like to be treated.

- State your name and identify the law enforcement agency for which you work.

- Explain the reason for the traffic stop, state the action you will take and be prepared to answer the motorist's questions about the stop.

- If you are not in uniform, and you are traveling in an unmarked vehicle, you must present identification to the person you have stopped.

- Consider the traffic stop "environment." Some motorists may be uncomfortable stopping in a deserted or badly lighted area, and may feel more comfortable if you allow them to proceed to a more populated or better illuminated location.

- Be courteous and firm—but flexible.

- Understand that a traffic stop can be a frightening experience for a motorist, and fear can bring out a person's worst side.

- Try to find the "positive" in the traffic stop. Use this opportunity to inform and educate.