

# NEIGHBOR NEWS

## What Should You Do - And Not Do During a Police Vehicle Stop?



It is normal to be nervous when you see those blue strobe lights in your rearview mirror. You may be wondering: Why me? What did I do? Why is that cop "picking" on me? Well, guess what. The police officer is also very concerned. So-called "routine" vehicle stops are one of the most dangerous functions a law enforcement officer conducts. It's an unfortunate fact that police officers are killed, or seriously injured, every year while conducting traffic stops.

Here are a few steps you can take, as a law-abiding person, to help reduce the stress and danger involved with police vehicle stops:

\* **It is important to understand** why a police officer may be stopping you in the first place. Law enforcement may not only stop your vehicle if they observe a traffic or equipment violation, but also because your vehicle may match one used in a crime, or they may want to warn you about a potentially dangerous situation, or the officer thinks you may need help, or you may have been a witness to a crime.

\* **When you see the flashing blue lights** (and/or hear a siren), **remain calm, slow down and pull over** in a safe location off the roadway.

\* **Please do not exit your vehicle** unless you are asked to do so. This is both for your safety and for the safety of the officer. Anyone exiting his car during a vehicle stop will make an officer *very nervous*, unless the officer has directed you to do so. Remember, the police do not know who you are, what condition you are in, or what may happen next.

\* **Keep your hands in plain view** by placing them on the steering wheel so the officer can see them.

\* **If you are stopped at night**, please **turn on your interior lights** (i.e., dome light).

\* **Be sure to inform the officer if you have any weapons** in the vehicle and their location. Do not reach or point to the weapon's location. **Let the officer direct you** as to how to retrieve the weapon.

\* **Avoid any sudden movements**, especially toward the floorboard, rear seat, or passenger side of the vehicle

\* **Please comply with the officer's request** to see your driver's license, and insurance information. If any of these documents are out of reach, please tell the officer where they are before you get them.

\* **It is best to answer all questions honestly**, and to avoid becoming argumentative with the officer.

\* **If the officer does issue you a citation**, and if you don't understand the reason, please cordially **ask the officer for details of your violation**. Remember, if you disagree with the violation, you will have the chance to address the issue in court.

\* **If the officer asks you to sign the citation** – please do so. Signing a ticket is not an admission of your guilt, and in some states, your refusal to sign a citation could result in your arrest.

\* **Generally**, an officer will provide his or her name and the reason you are being stopped, if requested.

\* **If an unmarked police car signals you** to pull you over, especially at night, and you are not sure the person is a police officer, please put on your four-way (hazard) flashers and dome light, and slowly drive to the **closest well-lit** public area. If you still are not comfortable with the situation, you may ask the officer for a marked police vehicle to stand by during your stop.



If you have a complaint about your treatment during a traffic stop, contact the officer's agency within a reasonable amount of time and ask to speak with a supervisor. If you have a compliment about the officer, please take a moment and write a letter of appreciation to the officer's department.

**A final thought:** Please remember that when an officer pulls you over, he does not know whether you are a law-abiding person or a wanted person. That is why he must take reasonable steps for the safety of all parties involved – including himself. Therefore, **it is always best to be cooperative and polite during a vehicle stop.**

### Crooks Love The Holiday Season

The holidays are rapidly approaching. What an exciting and busy time, filled with feasting, celebrating, exchanging gifts, and visiting family and friends. Homes jam-packed with glittering gifts; stores and malls teeming with unsuspecting shoppers; people rushing around, stressed out and careless, looking for last-minute gifts, trying to get everything done. It's enough to make a crook *giddy with holiday joy.*

This holiday season, don't let the spirit of giving lull you into giving burglars, muggers, and pickpockets a better chance to do their dirty work. Crooks love the holidays as much as everyone else, because **it's an opportune time for crime.**

### If You're Going Back Home (traveling). . . .

- Get an automatic timer for your lights.
- Ask a neighbor to watch your home, and even park in your driveway from time to time.
- Don't forget to have mail and newspaper delivery stopped. If it piles up, it's a sure sign you're gone.

### If You're Out for the Evening. . . .

- Turn on lights and a radio or TV so it looks like someone's home.
- Be extra cautious about locking doors and windows when you leave, even if it's just for a few minutes.
- Don't display gifts where they can be seen from outside.

### If You're Shopping. . . .

- Stay alert and be aware of what's going on around you.
- Park in a well-lighted space, and be sure to lock the car, close the windows, and lock shopping bags and gifts in the trunk.

- Avoid carrying large amounts of cash; pay with a check or credit card whenever possible.
- Deter pickpockets and purse-snatchers. Don't overburden yourself with packages. Be extra careful with purses and wallets. Carry your purse close to your body, not dangling by the straps, and put your wallet in a front pants pocket.
- Shopping with kids? Teach them to go to a store clerk or security guard if you get separated.
- Keep your keys and cell phone handy when you are returning to your car from shopping.
- Notify security or the Police about any criminal or suspicious activity.

### A Stranger at the Door

It's not uncommon for people to try to take advantage of others' generosity during the holidays by going door-to-door for charitable donations, when there's no charity involved. Ask for identification, and find out how the funds will be used. If you aren't satisfied, don't give. Help a charitable organization you know and like instead.

### Take a Holiday Inventory

The holidays are a good time to update - or create - your home inventory. Take photos or make videos of all valuables, and list descriptions and serial numbers. If your home is burglarized, having a detailed inventory can help identify stolen items and make insurance claims easier to file. Make sure things like TVs, VCRs, stereo equipment, cameras, camcorders, sports equipment, jewelry, silver, computers, home office equipment, and power tools are on the list.

### Last but not least

Don't let holiday stress get the best of your holiday spirit. **Crime Prevention starts at home.** Start a neighborhood tradition. Look in on your neighbors this holiday season. Make time to get together with family and friends. And think about reaching out in the spirit of the season and helping someone who's less fortunate or lonely. Do your part to make the holidays a safe and happy time for everybody - **except criminals.**



**From all of us, to all of you, we wish you the very best, happiest, and safest holidays.**