

# WHAT TO DO WHEN STOPPED BY THE POLICE

## WHY DO POLICE STOP PEOPLE?

There are many different reasons why you might be stopped by the police. Whatever the reason, the police officer needs your cooperation.

- You may have committed a traffic violation.
- You may fit the description of a suspect.
- The officer might think you are in trouble and need help.
- You may have witnessed a crime.

If you are stopped by the police while driving, you may feel confused, anxious or even angry. These are natural feelings, but remember, traffic stops can also be stressful and dangerous for the police officer. Each year, a number of law enforcement officers are killed or seriously injured while making the “routine” traffic stop. Police officers are especially vulnerable during the hours of darkness.

With this in mind, there are things that you, as a law abiding citizen, can do to help lessen the unpleasantness of the experience.

## REMEMBER:

In all cases, a citizen is required to cooperate with police.

## WHEN STOPPED BY POLICE, REMEMBER:

1. A police officer may pull you over at any time for a traffic offence or police investigation.
2. When you see the blue overhead lights and/or hear the siren, remain calm and safely pull over to the right side of the road.
3. Remain in your vehicle unless the officer advises you otherwise.
4. Keep your hands on the steering wheel so that the officer can see them.
5. Avoid any sudden movements, especially toward the floorboard, rear seat, or passenger side of the vehicle.
6. Do not immediately reach for your license or other documents until the officer requests them. Louisiana Law requires that drivers produce their license and registration upon request.
7. If your documents are out of reach, tell the officer where they are before you reach for them.
8. If the stop occurs during darkness, put on your dome or interior lights so the officer can easily see that all is in order.
9. If there are passengers in your vehicle, encourage them to remain quiet and cooperate with the instructions. You, as the operator, are solely responsible for your vehicle and its passengers.
10. The officer may issue you a ticket. If you feel the reason is vague or unclear, ask the officer for details.
11. Avoid becoming argumentative. Arguing will not change the officer’s mind. If you contest the violation, you will have the opportunity to address the matter in court.

12. Be honest with the officer. If you really didn't see the stop sign, or were unaware of the speed limit, let the officer know. Being honest about any situation never hurts.
13. Many departments use one-man patrol cars. It would be normal to see two or three marked units on a "routine" traffic stop.
14. Finally, if you receive a ticket, accept it calmly. Accepting it is not an admission of guilt. Your ticket describes your options including your right to appeal.

### **FINAL REMINDER:**

Louisiana Law requires that all drivers shall yield the right of way to emergency vehicles. Drivers are to immediately pull over to the right side of the road and come to a complete stop until the emergency vehicle has passed. This includes vehicles traveling in the opposite direction.

Each situation is unique and the police officer must alter his/her response to fit the circumstances.

### **GENERALLY, A POLICE OFFICER:**

- Will provide his or her name upon request.
- Who is not in uniform will present proper identification. You may request to examine his/her credentials so that you are satisfied they are a law enforcement officer.
- Will inform a person of the reason for being stopped.
- Will only use the force necessary to effect the arrest of a suspect and to maintain custody of the prisoner.
- Will not search the body of a person of the opposite sex except to prevent injury to the officer or another person, or to prevent the disposal or destruction of evidence.
- Will only arrest a person for a crime committed in the officer's presence, or when the officer has probable cause to believe the person has already committed the crime.

### **QUESTIONS/COMPLIMENTS/COMPLAINTS**

If you have a question about procedure or a complaint about your treatment, contact the Department and ask to speak with a supervisor. You may also send a letter of compliment if you feel the officer was particularly helpful in your situation.