



Traffic Stops by the Police

A traffic stop is one of the most frequent encounters between motorists and the police.

Why is contact being initiated?

Usually, police officers will pull a vehicle over if they have reason to believe that some offense has occurred. On the other hand, the police may have received a call to check on your welfare. Also the police may want to pass on some important information after a traffic collision or hazardous condition so the motoring public can avoid it. Some police contact may only serve to provide some piece of mind when traveling.

We have an idea what you may be feeling...?

You may feel anxious, irritated at the delay, or concerned about a possible citation. However, officers are concerned about a possible threat to their personal safety while performing their duties.

Ways to help make the car stop safer

The following recommended procedures will ensure that the traffic stop can be completed quickly and safely: When signaled by an officer, safely pull over to a place out of traffic flow. Ideally when traffic conditions permit and it is clear and safe, make a lane change with your right turn signal on and move to the right shoulder. Place your vehicle in park after you have stopped in a safe spot free of the traffic flow. Sit calmly, with your hands visible on the steering wheel. Avoid sudden movements or ducking in the seat; these actions can unnecessarily alarm the officer. If it is night, turn on your inside light when you pull the car over.

If stopped...“What did I do?”

While you are driving a car, if a police officer has reasonable suspicion or probable cause to believe that a violation of the Vehicle Code has been committed or a crime has occurred, you may be pulled over.

Slow down; pull over safely when you can. Stay in the driver's seat with both hands in sight on the steering wheel. You may want to turn off any music, cellular phone or extinguish your cigarette during the car stop so you can receive the correct information from the police officer without any distractions.

Do not exit your car unless asked to do so. Turn on your interior light if stopped at night.

You will probably be asked to show your driver's license, the registration to the vehicle, and proof that the vehicle is insured. These documents are required by state code to be in your possession when you operate a vehicle.

If your driver's license and/or registration are in the glove box or under the seat, state that and then retrieve them slowly. Get out of the automobile if asked to do so.

Safety Concerns

The following recommended procedures will ensure that the traffic stop can be conducted safely: For safety reasons, the officer will want to visually scan the car's interior before proceeding;

- Do not get out of your car unless the officer asks you to step out. If you are asked to do so, comply in a calm manner.
- A sure way to put an officer at ease is to communicate your actions in advance by telling the officer what you will be doing before you move.
- If requested, you must give the officer your driver's license, vehicle registration, and proof of insurance.
- Tell the officer where it is before reaching for it - especially if it is tucked away in the glove box or some other unusual place.

Things to Remember During the Car Stop

The best thing to do in this situation is to pull over, the driver and all passengers should stay cool and calm and remain in your car, unless told to do otherwise by the police officer(s).

If you are stopped at night, turn on your dome light and show the officer that there is nothing wrong, or any reason to fear for his or her safety. It is best not to make any sudden movement. Having your light on and keeping your hands on the steering wheel will usually put the officer's mind at ease.

Remember the officer cannot read your mind, he or she does not know if you're a law-abiding citizen or a criminal, and unfortunately for his or her safety, must assume the worst case scenario at first. Only, when you are asked for your ID, should you go about getting it.

At this point, you may start to explain or question what you were doing that caused you to get stopped, but that is as far as you should take it. Be Careful how you protest. This is not the place to argue your case.

The officer may legally start to check your car for equipment code violations under the vehicle code.

What Should Passengers Know?

Unless specifically stated otherwise by the officer, the reason for the stop involves the operator of the vehicle. Passengers should refrain from commenting or otherwise interfering with communication between the officer and the operator. Passengers may be asked or required to identify themselves based on the nature of the stop. If you have passengers, ask them to sit quietly with their hands visible.

Things to Remember After the Car Stop

If you feel that you are getting a ticket for something you didn't do or for something that is not fair, you should take your protest to court and explain your case to the Judge.

If you believe you have been treated unfairly, present your case in traffic court and not to the officer along the roadside.

Just because the officer gives you a ticket, does not automatically mean that you are guilty, or will be found guilty, or that you will have to pay a fine.

Remember, you are innocent until proven guilty. You have the right to go to Court and to have the Judge hear your explanation.

While you may wish to clarify the circumstances of the citation, keep in mind that your guilt or innocence can only be determined in court. Arguments over, or protests about the situation cannot be resolved at the car stop.