

## Traffic stops can be a stressful event

There are several reasons why you might be stopped by the police:

- You may have committed a traffic violation
- You may fit the description of a suspect
- You may have witnessed a crime
- The officer may think you need help or are otherwise at risk

If you are stopped by the police while driving, you may feel confused, anxious or even angry. These are natural feelings, but keep in mind that traffic stops are also stressful for the police officer. Nationally many officers are injured or killed while making a "routine" traffic stop.

In this brochure, we offer some general tips and advice for the motorist that can help make a traffic stop safer and less stressful for you AND the police officer.

[www.tacomapolice.org](http://www.tacomapolice.org)

## MISSION:

*To create a safe and secure environment in which to live, work, and visit by working together with the community, enforcing the law in a fair and impartial manner, preserving the peace and order in our neighborhoods, and safeguarding our constitutional guarantees.*



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Understanding The Police Traffic Stop

# TRAFFICSTOP

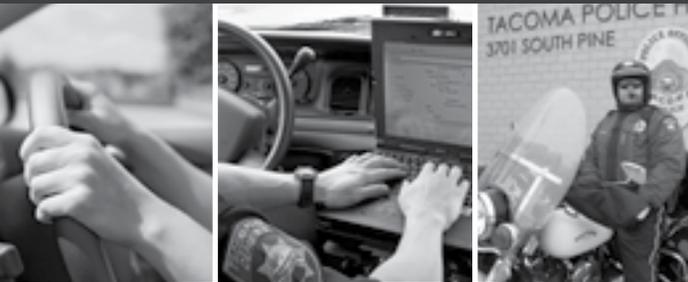


City of Tacoma, Washington  
Tacoma Police Department

## WHY DO THE POLICE STOP PEOPLE?

The quality of life throughout the City of Tacoma is heavily dependent upon the free movement of people and vehicles. The Tacoma Police Department has a major share of responsibility for achieving and maintaining that degree of order necessary to make this free movement possible.

Our primary objective in the movement of people and vehicles is a concern for public and officer safety.



Traffic enforcement is one of the many tasks performed by Tacoma police officers, but for some citizens, it can be an emotionally traumatic experience. In many cases, this is the only contact a person may have with a law enforcement officer.

The officers of the Tacoma Police Department are aware of these conditions and attempt to make each traffic stop and contact educational.

## IF YOU ARE STOPPED BY THE POLICE

- Pull off to the right side of the roadway and position your vehicle as far out of the lane of traffic as possible.
- Turn off your engine, radio, tape or CD player, or any other device that might hinder your communication with the officer.
- Turn on your four-way flashers (hazard lights) and during evening hours, turn on the vehicle's interior lights, so that the officer can see that everything is in order.
- Roll down your window so that you and the officer can communicate. Remain calm and if you have passengers in the vehicle, ask them to remain calm as well. Keep your seatbelt fastened and ask your passengers to do the same.
- Stay in your vehicle and do not get out unless the officer asks you to exit the vehicle.
- Keep your hands in plain view on the steering wheel in the "10 o'clock" and "2 o'clock" position. Ask your passengers to keep their hands in plain view, such as on their laps.
- Do not make any sudden movement that might be interpreted by the officer that you are hiding or searching for something.



## IF YOUR VEHICLE IS STOPPED, THE KEY IS COOPERATION.

The following information is provided to help you understand your role during a traffic stop.

- Make sure that you are carrying the proper identification. In the State of Washington you must possess a valid driver's license, proof of vehicle registration and proof of insurance. If the officer asks you for these documents, tell the officer where they are and reach for them slowly, again avoiding any sudden movements.
- Answer the officer's questions fully and as clearly as possible, and if there is anything you do not understand, politely ask the officer to repeat himself/herself.
- Do not be surprised if another patrol car appears on the scene. This is only done to assure the officer's safety and is normal procedure.
- If the charge or citation (ticket) is not clear, ask the officer for an explanation in a polite manner. Avoid becoming argumentative. If you disagree with the citation (ticket), you will have the opportunity to contest the citation (ticket) in court.
- Keep in mind that each traffic stop is unique, and the officer will act and respond to fit the circumstance.

**IN THE INTEREST OF PUBLIC SAFETY, COOPERATION WITH THE POLICE IS A COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITY.**