



10-4

A weekly Q&A
with local
law enforcement

Submit *your* question to news@owatonna.com or 444-2379

Q: If it is against the law for the public to not completely stop for a stop sign, why is it okay for police and sheriff's deputies to not stop as well when they are not on an emergency call?

A: The short answer to this question is that it is not okay for any law enforcement officer to disobey stop sign regulations when not answering emergency calls for service. However, one of the larger issues here is what constitutes an emergency response.

By state statute, law enforcement officers are to activate their emergency lights OR siren when responding to an emergency call. The purpose of this law is not only to increase response time for the officer, but to also notify the public of their intentions so that proper yielding for the emergency vehicle can be done.

With that said, sometimes officers respond to certain types of calls without lights and siren activated such as burglaries, hold-up alarms, robberies, etc., where they do not want to advertise to the bad guy that they are en-route or have arrived. To do so would not only make matters worse, but the element of surprise would not be there. To arrive unannounced, so to speak, offers the officer a better chance of catching the bad guy in the act and/or minimizing damages already done.

However, when these officers do so, and even during any emergency response, they are still required to exercise "due caution" when responding. Just because the officer is going to an emergency, even when they have their emergency lights flashing and/or siren blaring, it does not give them carte blanche to disregard the law. They still have to proceed, especially through intersections, with extreme caution. Failure to do so would and has left the officer responsible for the consequences associated with breaking the law.

As officers are doing patrol work, they do, just like the motoring public, become complacent from time to time, in coming to a complete stop at a stop sign. This action is unacceptable, especially in a marked patrol squad as they should be demonstrating good driving practices at all times when on patrol. It may even mean over emphasizing the action from time to time such as remaining stopped at a stop sign for a slightly longer period of time just to prove a point in demonstrating a "proper" stop to the public.

Police officers need to obey traffic laws just like everyone else on the roadway; however, at times because of their inherent duty, it may appear to the public that they are breaking the law on purpose as they respond to things in the course of their duties. However, even when responding to emergencies, they are still responsible for their actions and driving behaviors. As police officers, we have to remember that we are subject to the same laws as everyone else.

CHUCK WALERIUS, PATROL COMMANDER
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