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A weekly Q&A
with local
law enforcement

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

Q: While operating a motor vehicle, what is considered to be obstructed vision by Minnesota law? How does this apply to me?

A: Public safety is a concern which is addressed by the legislature in state statute 169.71, specifically the display of signs, posters or other non-transparent materials. This statute prohibits the display of signs, posters or other non-transparent materials upon the windshield, side-ings, or side windows or rear windows of any motor vehicle, other than a certificate or other paper required to be so displayed by law or authorized by the state director of the Division of Emergency Management or the commissioner of public safety. An example of this would be a temporary license certificate.

There are, however, several exceptions written in the statute. The rear window of a pickup truck is exempt, as is the rear or side windows on either side behind the driver's seat of a van or SUV. Also exempt are law enforcement vehicles.

This statute also addresses the issue of window tint. Window tint cannot have a light transmittance of less than 50 percent on side and rear windows with the exception of original installed windows from the manufacturer installed prior to August 1, 1985. You may not apply any type of material which reduces light transmittance through the windshield. Again there are several exceptions. The rear windows of a pickup truck, the rear or side windows on either side behind the driver's seat of a van or SUV, the rear and side windows of a funeral home vehicle and the side and rear windows of a limousine.

What about hanging an air freshener or other items from the rear view mirror? State statute declares that a person shall not drive or operate any motor vehicle with any objects suspended between the driver and the windshield. The intent of this section is to provide the driver with a clear field of vision without distraction.

Driver distraction is a major cause of automobile crashes which can result in serious injury or death. The enforcement of the vision obstruction statute is designed to help provide a safer driving environment for all citizens.

Joe Wagoner, Patrol Officer
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