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A weekly Q&A
with local
law enforcement

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

Q: Why does the Police Department spend so much time enforcing stop sign violations?

A: The Owatonna Police Department has implemented an aggressive campaign of stop sign enforcement. Intersections are selected for enforcement as a result of citizen complaints/concerns, the frequency of accidents at a particular intersection, and/or the potential for serious accidents. The most serious injuries and violent collisions are usually involving intersections where a driver violated some type of traffic control device or sign. The primary goal of traffic enforcement is to reduce traffic collisions, fatalities and injuries, and to facilitate the safe movement of vehicular traffic.

Minnesota State Statute 169.30 requires “every driver of a vehicle shall stop at a stop sign or at a clearly marked stop line before entering the intersection.” The definition of “stop” according to Minnesota State Statutes is under Definitions Subd. 57. Stop. “Stop” means complete cessation from movement. In other words, making a complete stop where the tires stop any movement and not necessarily for any specific length of time, but complete cessation of movement.

In recent years, the police department implemented specific traffic details to enforce traffic laws related to speeding, aggressive driving, driving while intoxicated, or stop sign violations. Traffic details are assigned to enforce specific violations in specific locations. The department utilizes legal and reliable video recording technology to assist in identifying violators while conducting a stop sign detail. Officers will look at several factors while making a determination to issue a traffic citation during these details. For example, they will look at the speed of the vehicle as it approaches and continues through the intersection; often vehicles will slow and then accelerate through the intersection without stopping. The driver may be in a hurry, distracted, or impatient or tries to “beat the traffic” to cross the intersection. Many drivers are not aware of their habits until they “see for themselves” on video. Ultimately, the court system is responsible for determining if a violation occurred and if the issuance of a citation is just.

The Owatonna Police Department believes that reducing the number of driving errors and traffic violations through enforcement will reduce the number of traffic related fatalities and accidents. In the coming weeks, the Police Department will publish not only traffic enforcement results, but also exactly where these traffic details will be located in the city on a weekly basis. In order to increase transparency, the public will be advised in advance exactly where these details will be concentrated.

There is a direct relationship between the quality of enforcement and the degree of safety with which citizens use the roadway. The ultimate goal is to have the motoring public obey the law voluntarily when police are not in the area which will help ensure a safe journey for everyone.

Sgt. TOM MURPHY
Owatonna Police Department