



CANTON POLICE DEPARTMENT
1150 S. Canton Center Road, Canton, MI 48188
www.canton-mi.org/publicsafety

Crime Prevention Unit
734/394-5424

What To Do If You Are Stopped By A Police Officer

Police officers must continually engage citizens during the course of their duties. Law enforcement officers are trained how to do so safely, efficiently and effectively. A problem can occur, however, when citizens do not know how to react and respond when approached or engaged by a police officer. This lack of knowledge can result in fear, nervousness, anger or even aggressive behavior on the part of the citizen.

Until recently, little effort was made to tell citizens what to do when stopped or engaged by a police officer. It was seldom a topic broached in schools or the media. As a result, citizen's response in such situation was often predicated upon what they had seen on television or the movies. Their response might also be based upon word-of-mouth rumors from friends, family members or associates.

In recent years, a number of law enforcement agencies have developed guidelines or recommendations about "What to do if you are stopped by a police officer." The goal of these guidelines is to educate the public related to their rights and responsibilities when engaged by a law enforcement officer and to reduce the probability of conflict between police officers and citizens.

What To Do If You Are Stopped By A Police Officer

Why Would a Police Officer Want to Question Me?

When law enforcement representatives question a person, there are underlying reasons. They may be checking out a complaint phoned into police by someone in the neighborhood. They may have received a report of some criminal activity, which has just occurred in the area. Your presence might indicate that you are a potential witness who would be able to provide valuable information in an investigation. In some cases the officers' observations might lead them to think you are having trouble and need assistance.

The best way for them to clarify the situation is to ask questions. With all due respect to citizens' rights, officers have a responsibility to properly investigate matters, which may threaten public safety or involve breaking the law. Their questions are not necessarily an accusation, and your cooperative response can alleviate potential conflict.

What to Do if a Police Officer Stops Me on the Street

Sometimes problems arise when it seems as if a police officer has stopped to question you for what appears to be no reason at all. Since the time factor may be crucial in investigating a possible crime, suspicion that you may in some way be involved in an incident.

There are many factors that officers take into consideration in determining if they have a reasonable suspicion to stop and question someone. Every situation is different, but some factors they may consider are:

Police may have a minimal description of a suspect, which you might resemble.
You might be in an area where a crime has just been committed.
Your actions appear to be suspicious (i.e. running from an area where a crime has just been committed) and you act even more suspiciously when you see the police officer.
Someone may have pointed you out as a suspect.

Your forthright responses, if an officer does stop and question you, will usually quickly resolve the situation. If the officer hasn't told you why you have been stopped, you may inquire.

If despite these considerations, you feel that you do not want to respond, the officer must respect your right not to answer. However, your cooperation could be most helpful in aiding a police investigation.

What Should You Do If a Police Officer Stops You in Your Motor Vehicle

A traffic stop is one of the most frequent encounters between citizens and police. Usually, police officers will pull a vehicle over if they have reason to believe that some offense has occurred. You may feel anxious, irritated at the delay, or concerned about a possible citation. However, officers are also concerned about possible threats to their personal safety while performing their duties.

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.
- Sit calmly, with your hands visible on the steering wheel. If you have passengers, ask them to sit quietly with their hands visible. (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. 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. Also, you can ask to see the officer's identification.
- If requested, you must give the officer your driver's licenses and vehicle registration. 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.

If you are issued a citation, you will be asked to sign it. Signing is not an admission of guilt, but an acknowledgement that you have received the citation. 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 in the street.

What to Do If a Police Officer Comes to Your Door

Usually if a police officer knocks on your door, it is for one of the following reasons:

- To interview you or a member of your household as a witness to an incident that is being investigated
- To make a notification
- To serve an arrest warrant
- To serve a search and seizure warrant

Whenever police come to your door, they should willingly provide identification and state their purpose for being there.

However, when serving a warrant, officers may dispense with the knock and announce requirement if they believe some emergency circumstances exist which necessitate a speedy or unannounced entry. Examples of such circumstances include, but are not limited to, protection of life or the possibility that evidence might be destroyed.

If the officers have a warrant, you may ask to see a copy of it. Although, if it is an arrest warrant, it is not necessary for the warrant to be in the officers' possession for them to make an arrest. You must comply with the warrant and admit the officers into your house.

An arrest warrant commands a police officer to arrest the person named in the warrant. It also authorizes the officer to search the residence of the named individual in order to locate the person to carry out the arrest. An arrest warrant does not permit the entry and search of a third party's residence for the named person without a search and seizure warrant. A search and seizure warrant is a document supported by an affidavit and signed by a judge, commanding a police officer to search specifically named premises for the property or person described in the warrant. The officer will provide the resident with a copy of the warrant after reading the contents of the warrant to them. Once the search is completed, a list of the property seized will be provided.

An officer may execute a search and seizure warrant at any time of the day. The owner/occupant does not have to be present. When this occurs, a copy of the warrant and inventory will be left at the residence in a conspicuous location.

Police officers may conduct a search without a warrant in certain situations. Two main examples of when this might occur would be in situations involving the emergency circumstances noted above or searches done with the consent of a person that have authority over the property. If you consent to a search, you have the right to withdraw that consent at any time during the search. Just clearly tell the officers that you wish the search to stop.

When You Are Stopped by a Police Officer, Generally They Will ...

- Provide their name upon request
- If in plain clothes, identify themselves when taking action
- Inform a person about the reason for being stopped or questioned
- Only use the amount of force necessary to affect the arrest of a suspect. The department does not tolerate excessive force.

Crime Prevention Initiatives

Among the means of disseminating this information to the public are the following:

- Place the information on the law enforcement agencies' Internet website.
- Print the information in a brochure format
- Have D.A.R.E. or G.R.E.A.T. officers share the information with their students
- Have School Resource Officers disseminate the information to Students in their schools
- Disseminate the information to participants in Neighborhood Watch programs
- Disseminate the information to participants in National Night Out programs
- Provide the information to Citizen Police Academy participants
- Provide the information to the local print and broadcast news media
- Provide brochures to law enforcement officers and encourage them to use the brochures as a part of their community policing efforts

