

POLICE1

2022 GUIDE

**TRAFFIC STOP
TACTICS AND
TRAINING**

**Prioritizing officer and
community safety**

Sponsored by



WHAT SHOULD MODERN LAW ENFORCEMENT LOOK LIKE?

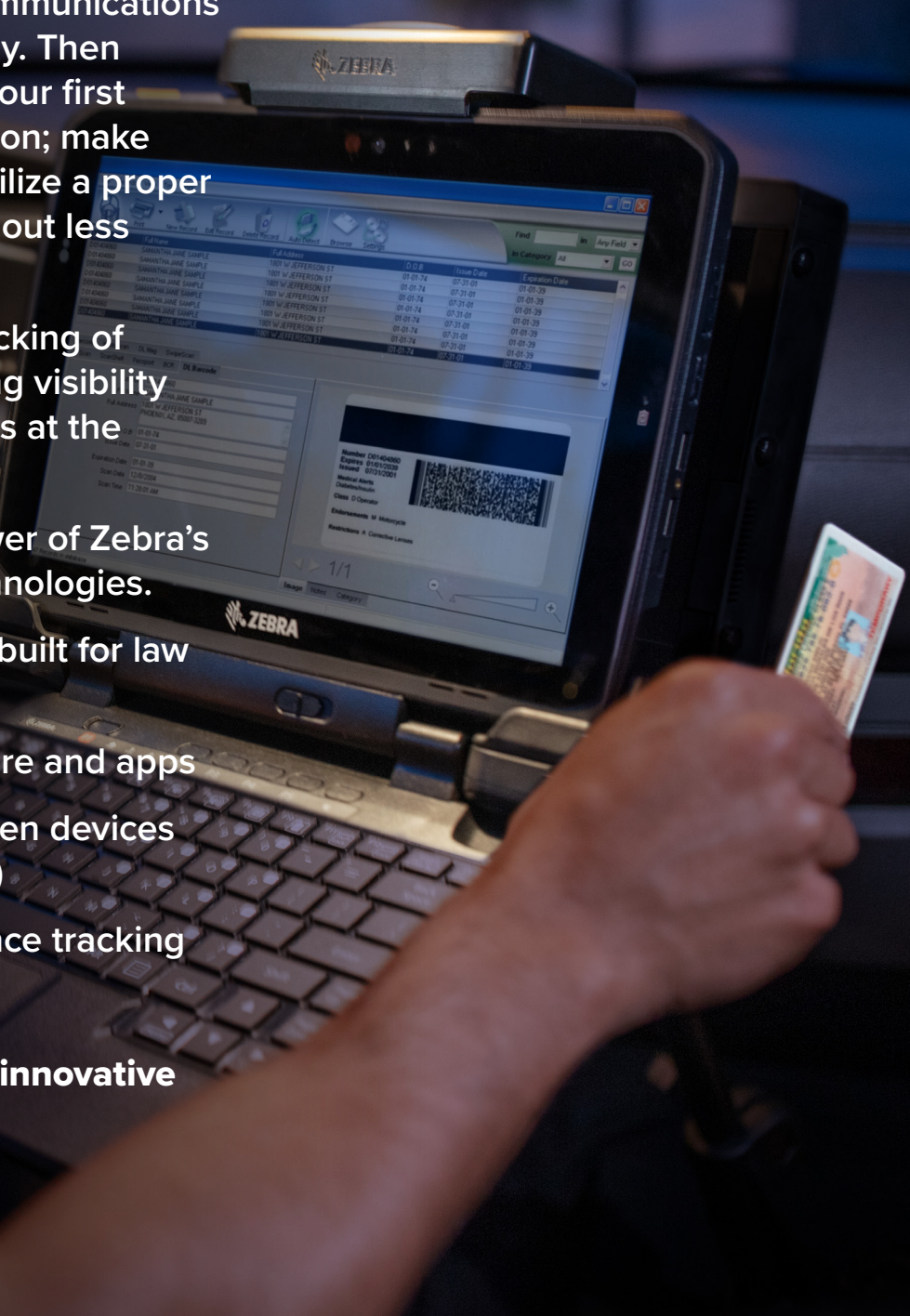
It starts with more reliable communications and purpose-built functionality. Then continues with empowering your first responders to share information; make fast, informed decisions; mobilize a proper response; and document without less paper processes.

It continues with real time tracking of evidence and assets, providing visibility for command staff and officers at the station.

That's the transformative power of Zebra's mobile Law Enforcement technologies.

- Durable, reliable, purpose-built for law enforcement
- Simple to integrate software and apps
- Instant data sharing between devices (photos, video, documents)
- Real-time asset and evidence tracking
- Multiple layers of security

To learn more about Zebra's innovative law enforcement solutions visit zebra.com.





FROM THE EDITOR

Traffic stops and vehicle contacts put police officers at a tactical disadvantage, with officer safety further compromised when faced with non-compliant drivers. To better understand officers' experiences, perceptions, training and tactics for non-compliance during traffic stops, Police1 surveyed more than 1,000 patrol officers.

This eBook analyzes the results of the survey, shares top tactics from Police1 readers to reduce risk, and reviews essential safety tactics for the four primary phases of a traffic stop.

I encourage you to read and share this eBook with your members and consider implementing these essential tips and safety tactics to reduce officer risk during traffic stops.

Nancy Perry
Editor-in-Chief, Police1.com

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Nancy Perry
NPerry@lexipol.com

SENIOR ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Sarah Calams
SCalams@lexipol.com

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Greg Friese
GFriese@lexipol.com

VP OF CONTENT

Jon Hughes
JHughes@lexipol.com

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Gail Parker
GParker@lexipol.com

Sponsored by



CONTENTS

04

Police research: 1,000 cops address non-compliance during traffic stops

By Nancy Perry

16

Using police observations on traffic stops to inform policy

By Bob Harrison

23

Essential safety tactics for the four primary phases of a traffic stop

By Tyson Kilbey



1,000 COPS ADDRESS
**NON-COMPLIANCE
DURING
TRAFFIC STOPS**

Read about cops' concerns regarding traffic stop safety, training and tactics

By Nancy Perry

Traffic stops and vehicle contacts put police officers at a tactical disadvantage, with officer safety further compromised when faced with non-compliant drivers. To better understand officers' experiences, perceptions, training and tactics for non-compliance during traffic stops, Police1 surveyed more than 1,000 patrol officers.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY AND RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Police1 developed a 29-question survey, open from April 22, 2021, to May 4, 2021. A total of 1,036 responses were collected using a Microsoft Form.

Respondents were fairly evenly divided regarding location and years served in law enforcement. Of those surveyed, 24% serve a rural response area, 42% serve a suburban response area and 34% serve an urban response area.

A third of respondents had 10-20 years of law enforcement experience and a quarter had 21-30 years of experience; a third had nine years or less

on the job and 10% had more than 30 years on the job

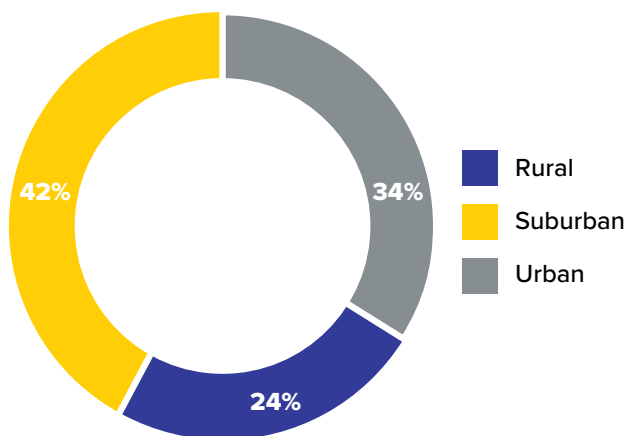
TRAFFIC STOP ACTIVITY

We asked respondents to rank the most common reason for traffic stops in their jurisdiction. Not surprisingly, especially since [COVID-19 lockdowns](#), speeding was overwhelmingly listed as the number one reason for traffic stops at 43% followed by equipment violations at 24%. Only 13% of respondents rated distracted driving as the number one reason for traffic stops, pretext stops and hazardous driving were rated number one by only 9% and 7% of respondents respectively.

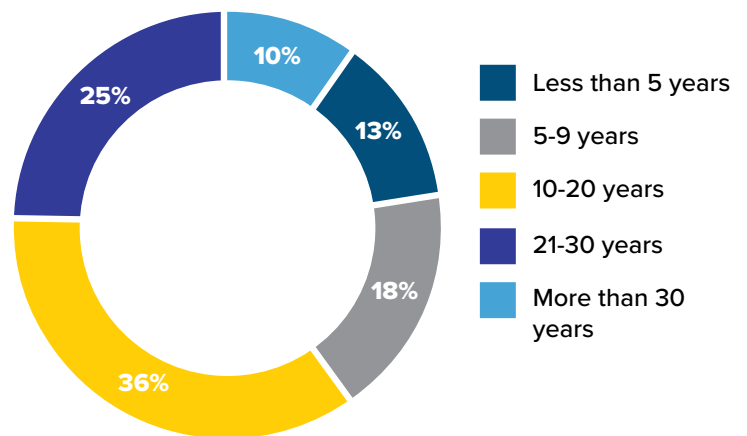
While 2020 saw a huge increase in speeding violations nationwide, regarding non-speeding traffic violations, 41% of respondents said they had decreased in the past year and 17% had stayed the same. Forty-two percent said they had increased.

We wanted to know if officers had changed their behavior regarding traffic stops since 2019 and nearly two-thirds (59%) of those who responded said they were less likely to stop a vehicle in violation of traffic laws while on patrol than two years ago, while a third (36%) said there was no change. Only 2% were more likely to stop a vehicle.

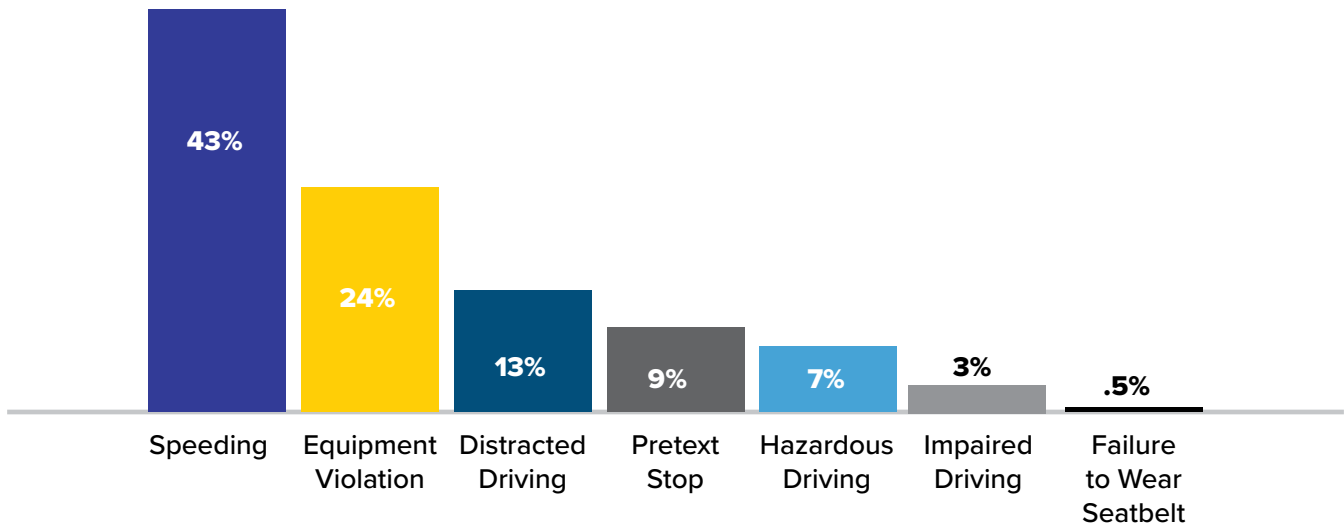
RESPONDENTS PRIMARY RESPONSE AREA



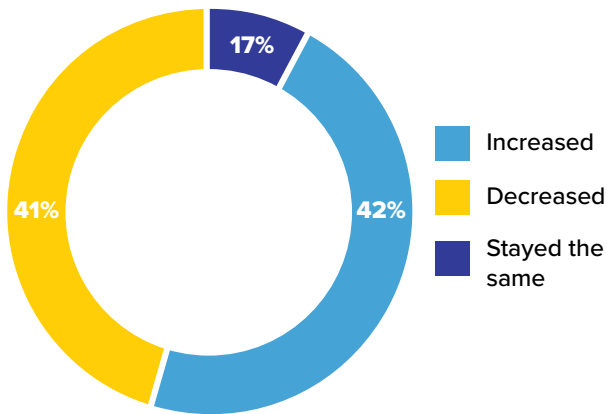
YEARS SERVED IN LAW ENFORCEMENT



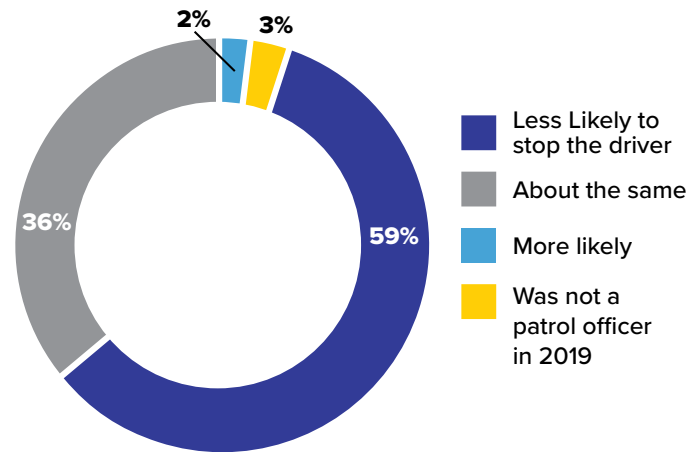
RANK THE MOST COMMON REASON FOR TRAFFIC STOPS IN YOUR JURISDICTION



IN THE LAST YEAR HAVE NON-SPEEDING TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS IN YOUR JURISDICTION:



COMPARED TO 2019, WHEN I SEE A VEHICLE IN VIOLATION OF TRAFFIC LAWS WHILE I AM ON PATROL, I AM:



COMPLIANCE BEHAVIORS

We asked how compliance behaviors during traffic stops had changed over the past year. While half of the respondents said it had stayed the same, 49% said compliance had worsened.

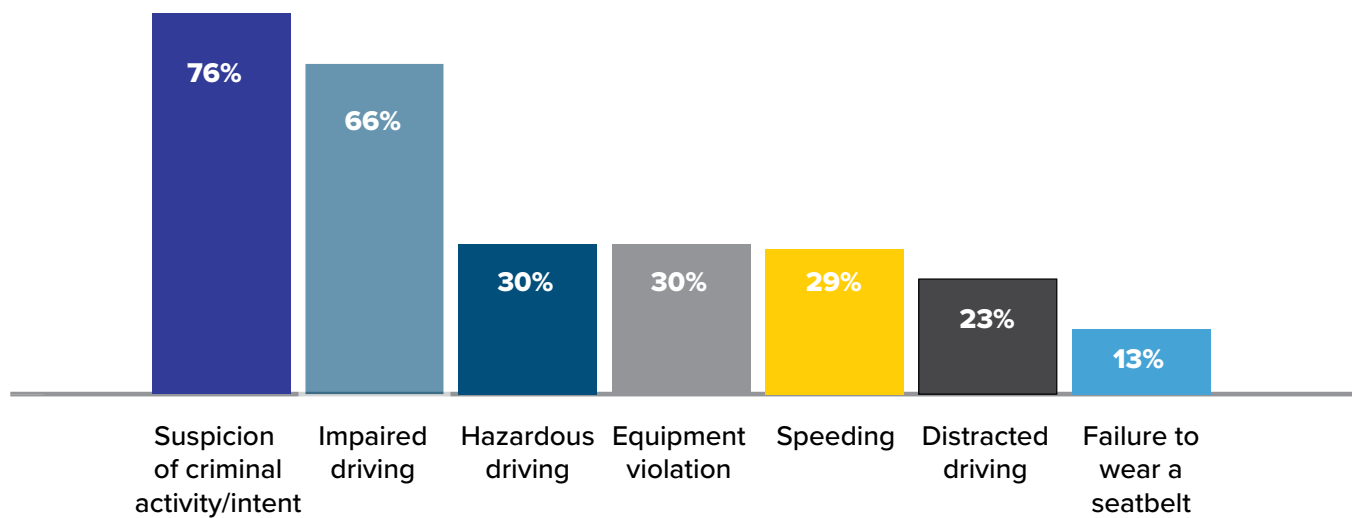
We asked respondents to select the types of traffic stops most likely to result in non-compliance. Suspicion of criminal intent and impaired driving were selected most often, with 76% and 66% of respondents selecting one or both. Just over a third of respondents said hazardous driving, equipment violations and speeding were likely to result in non-compliance. Just over one in five respondents selected

distracted driving and just over 10% selected failure to wear a seatbelt

The most common non-compliance behavior encountered was a failure to follow commands (42%) followed by a failure to answer questions (24%). Around 10% of respondents said refusal to show a driver’s license and other documents or furtive movements.

We asked respondents to list the actions they did at every traffic stop, whether as a result of personal habits or policies. Nearly all the respondents indicated that they notify dispatch they are on a traffic stop and tell the driver the reason they were stopped. They also request

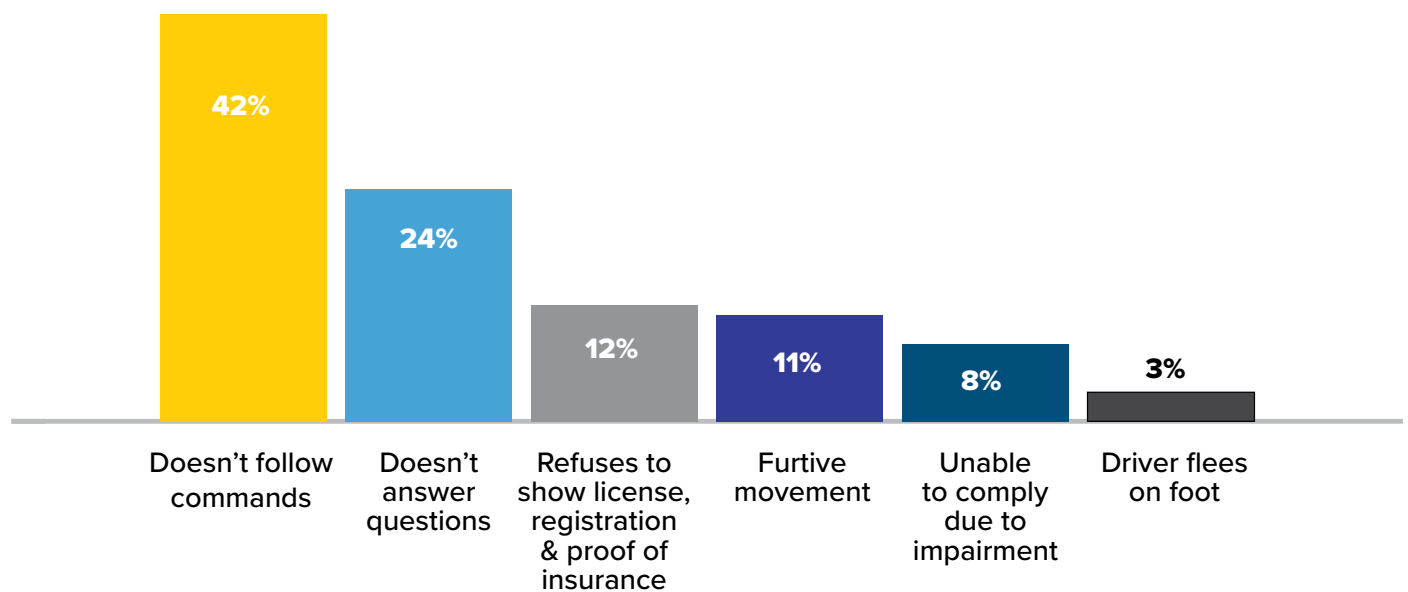
IN YOUR EXPERIENCE, WHICH TYPES OF TRAFFIC STOPS ARE MOST LIKELY TO RESULT IN NON-COMPLIANCE (Respondents could select multiple answers)



the driver’s license, registration and proof of insurance and scan the vehicle interior for hazards. Two-thirds of the respondents activate their body-worn camera during traffic stops and 57% active the dash camera; 62% percent conduct a license plate check before contact. Half of those surveyed touch the vehicle to leave their prints, while only 4% of the officers who answered this survey call for backup.

We asked respondents if there is a non-compliance red flag – a specific action, behavior, or response – they want every police officer to be aware of. Respondents contributed more than 500 red flag actions and behaviors. We compiled the top responses and themes in the sidebar “Officers identify red flags for non-compliance during traffic stops.”

WHAT IS THE MOST COMMON NON-COMPLIANCE BEHAVIOR YOU ENCOUNTER?



RED FLAGS

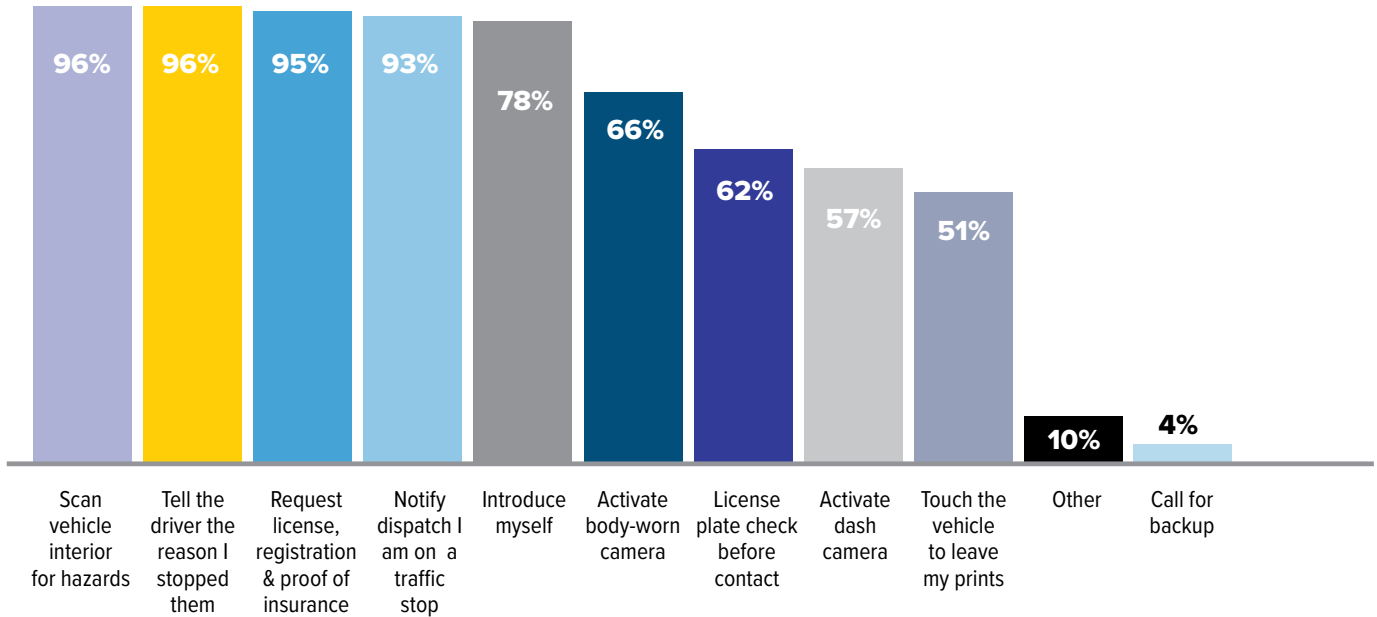
FOR NON-COMPLIANCE DURING TRAFFIC STOPS

As part of the survey, respondents identified more than 500 red flag actions and behaviors that indicate the potential for non-compliance during a traffic stop.

We compiled the top responses and themes for handy review:

- After traffic stop initiation, the vehicle continues at a slow pace, failing to yield for a short while, then yielding in an advantageous position for the vehicle occupants. This behavior can be an indication of escape/assault planning, concealment of contraband, coordination of alibis amongst occupants, etc.
- Not completely pulling off the highway/roadway.
- Driver calls someone after the stop (almost always an indicator of the driver being aware of having a warrant and is calling someone to take possession of the vehicle or to let them know they are getting arrested).
- The driver watches your movements as you approach the vehicle.
- The driver does not roll down the window.
- The driver attempts to move your attention away from them, i.e., drops his license on the ground so you have to pick it up.
- The subject repeats every question or asks “What?” when asked or told a simple thing.
- Inappropriate delays in compliance, which can indicate a subject is thinking up false responses to questions or formulating a plan to take action against the officer.
- When they are asked to exit the vehicle and they stall.
- Subjects separating themselves from the vehicle without being asked to do so as they are trying to separate themselves and you from illegal activity in the vehicle.
- Scanning the area looking for a “way out.”
- Immediate shifting of the body to abnormal areas of the vehicle (not glove box, middle console, or visor) such as down below the driver’s seat or back seat.
- Whitening of fingers and hands as they grip the steering wheel.
- Vehicle shaking as if occupants are moving erratically from within.
- Immediate hostility before knowing the reason for the traffic stop.
- When a driver says, “I am just trying to go home” they have been in a position where they knew they were about to be arrested due to the gun, drugs and/or warrant that they had. This is a psychological cue much like a security touch of a weapon that the person knows that the officer is about to impede them from going home for quite some time and expresses that all they want is to prevent the impending arrest due to their misconduct and continue on home. So, if someone expresses an over-eagerness to “just get home” be on guard you may be on to something.
- If they start to smoke, be cautious because it generally means they either did something and believe they are being caught or they have warrants and want to get a last smoke in before they go to jail.
- The thousand-yard stare when the suspect’s flight or fight response is starting is the best red flag I’ve experienced in my 25 years of experience. They are weighing the risks vs. rewards in real-time. They can hear you, but they are listening to their own internal dialog on how to survive without going to prison.
- Repeating your questions, especially when the subject is sober. This is a stalling technique for them to formulate a plan. Using the phone instead of addressing you is another one. They’re not just being rude; they’re stalling, calling for backup, etc.
- Watch for false compliance. Someone who is being too nice can lull you into thinking everything is okay.

WHICH OF THESE DO YOU DO AT EVERY TRAFFIC STOP, EITHER BY PERSONAL HABIT OR DEPARTMENT POLICY REQUIREMENT?



TRAFFIC STOP POLICIES

We asked respondents if their department had made changes to their traffic stop policy in the last year. The majority (78%) said no, while a fifth (19%) said yes.

For the 24% of respondents whose agencies had implemented policy changes, many indicated those changes were due to social distancing requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic. A summary of additional changes is listed here:

- Mandatory camera and mandatory paperwork to track driver race.
- Only make stops if the violations are hazardous to other drivers. Not allowed to stop for any type of license plate or registration offenses.
- Colorado House Bill requires a list of information to be provided for every stop. Agency policy mirrors this and requires that we provide the info we have prior to the stop in addition to the info collected while in contact with the driver, including the “perceived race” of the driver prior to the stop. Officers, in general, are afraid of stopping violators of certain races for fear of lawsuits or civil action.

- Chemical agents and pepper ball deployment are now allowed for non-compliant drivers. We are no longer allowed to pursue for traffic violations.
- Unless the violation is one in which the violator has done something so unsafe that it places public safety in jeopardy, i.e., a very dangerous or egregious act, we are not to ignore it, but rather re-evaluate the risks in making the traffic stop and weigh assigned primary responsibilities against the need to deal with a minor traffic law infringement.
- No more “performance standard” (20 stops a month).
- No more custodial in most situations.
- No longer can give a verbal warning. You must write a citation or written warning.
- Reduced stops on minor infractions.
- Became policy to issue stop receipts to motorists stopped.
- Changes made to what we do when in contact with firearms during a traffic stop.
- No pretext stops unless there is an abundance of reasonable suspicion or probable cause.

- Patrol vehicles now have video cameras.
- We must now include the race of the vehicle operator for all stops and have bodycams activated. We also have a new stricter pursuit policy.
- Can't make someone exit the vehicle unless you have PC.
- No vehicle (or pedestrian) contacts unless witnessing a violent crime.
- Force not to be used to get a person out of the vehicle for the sole purpose of towing the vehicle.
- The policy changed from a "should" activate body-worn cameras during traffic stops to a "shall" activate body-worn cameras when you know you are going to stop a vehicle.
- Some arrestable offenses such as driving on a suspended license are now prohibited in most cases. Policy requires us to consider the least intrusive or financially impactful course of action was also implemented. It basically says to ticket drivers less or not at all.
- The Sandra Bland Act tightens racial profile reporting resulting in more data gathering and reporting.
- Call in to dispatch with all traffic stops.
- Beginning July 1, 2020, Virginia House Bill 1250, commonly known as the Community Policing Act, became law. It requires local law enforcement agencies to collect and report certain data pertaining to drivers to the Virginia State Police during a motor vehicle (traffic) stop.
- Can no longer tell someone to not make phone calls during traffic stops.
- About a year or two ago, they started requiring us to introduce ourselves by name and department and the reason for the stop at the initial contact.
- Must attempt to deescalate and talk before using force, but there is no definition of how long you need to talk and deescalate before you can step up force.
- Reduced pursuit of fleeing vehicles to violent felonies only.
- Pit maneuver made a use of deadly force.
- We only request licenses from operators as registration and insurance information can be obtained via DMV now.
- A demographic form required on any self-initiated stop that states race, gender, age, the reason for stop and action taken.
- Non-enforcement of suspended driving violations.
- If the subject doesn't pull over for the traffic stop and continues to drive on, but you don't have an exigent circumstance to continue into a vehicle pursuit, then the officer must shut down his equipment and let the vehicle go.
- No longer able to ask if there are drugs or weapons in the car unless that was the reason we stop them.
- Explain the reason for the stop prior to getting ID.
- Equipment violations have become a secondary violation only by law, can no longer arrest the driver for refusal to sign the traffic ticket. A requirement to issue warning cards where we previously just verbally warned the driver.
- Discourage officers from making stops purely for equipment and non-safety-related violations believing this will reduce negative contacts with violators.
- The list of primary offenses we can stop for has gotten considerably smaller. Required use of bodycams (new to department) and in-car video. More of an emphasis on issuing warnings unless it's for offenses that are "hot button" like texting while driving or driving without a seatbelt.
- Addresses signing or not signing the citation, and now involves a supervisor to decide if the party can be booked for the charge.

Only 16% of respondents said their department's traffic stop policy specifically addresses driver

non-compliance; 68% said their policy does not address non-compliance and 14% were unsure.

If the department's traffic stop policy specifically addresses driver non-compliance, responders were asked to explain how the policy addresses non-compliance. Reasons listed include:

- Supervisors must respond to the scene before a refusal to sign can be taken into custody.
- Call for a cover unit.
- It encourages officers to consider the overall circumstances and make a decision on whether the non-compliance is a critical matter requiring immediate action such as an arrest or can be ignored or worked through to complete the task without undue hazard to the officer or traffic offender.
- Chemical agents can be used for drivers refusing to exit the vehicle and we can now use glass breaker rounds from a pepper ball gun to break windows.
- If you can issue the citation, issue it. Don't escalate the stop.
- Request supervisor and additional unit.
- Immediately call for backup. Stall and attempt to talk to the person and diffuse if possible or maintain status quo conversation until backup arrives. Then escalate as needed to identify and detain the driver to permit further investigation into the reason behind non-compliance.
- If someone refuses to identify themselves and refuses to step out of the vehicle we are to call a supervisor before we can break a window out. If the driver takes off in the vehicle we are not allowed to pursue unless they have committed a violent felony.
- We have a process of verbal cues we make before going hands-on, the last being, "Is there anything I can do or say to get you to comply?" When that's said, everyone knows hands-on is coming immediately.
- If the driver refuses to sign a summons our policy requires a supervisor (or uninvolved officer if a supervisor is unavailable) to

respond and attempt to communicate to the recipient of the summons the requirement by law.

- If the driver fails to comply with any directives they are informed of the law authorizing officers to use reasonable force to remove them from the vehicle and they are given time to comply after they have been educated on the law. If they continue to remain non-compliant they are forcibly removed and arrested.

We asked if department policy encourages that, when conditions allow, traffic stop approaches are made at specific locations, such as a well-lit convenience store or near a firehouse, even if it means following a vehicle for a short while. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (59%) said no, just over a third (37%) said yes and 5% were unsure.

REASSIGNING TRAFFIC ENFORCEMENT

While there has been a lot of discussion among legislators and community groups about [reducing the role of police in enforcing traffic laws](#), only 7% of survey respondents support such proposals. The majority (87%) do not support such proposals and 6% were unsure.

We asked respondents what traffic enforcement tasks should be reassigned from law enforcement to another agency. Here is a sampling of some of the responses we received:

- We should not be stopping vehicles for a broken windshield, distracted driving, broken equipment, expired plates and seatbelt use.
- Car crashes not involving death or DWI should not be a police matter. Anything regarding abandoned cars and parking complaints. Police should ONLY address specific violations related to unsafe driving that threatens public safety.
- Speeding, registration.
- Stop sign violations.
- Parking.

- All traffic with the exception of pretext and DUI.
- Reckless driving when the complainant calls in but not available to interview.
- Red light camera violations along with speed enforcement cameras where citations are sent to the offenders where no interaction from law enforcement at all.
- Registration compliance.

IMPROVING OFFICER SAFETY, TRAINING

We wanted to know how much traffic-stop training was provided to respondents. The majority (50%) receive yearly training, while 42% do not receive any training. Only 6% receive monthly training.

Respondents were asked to select the types of training received for traffic stops with non-compliant drivers since 2019. Many respondents selected more than one method, with online training, legal case reviews, roll call briefings and classroom lectures are the most common type of training formats. Hands-on training and simulation are not as frequently encountered.

Nearly half of respondents believe they have not received adequate department-provided training

for traffic stops involving non-compliant drivers, while a quarter strongly agrees or agree they had received adequate training.

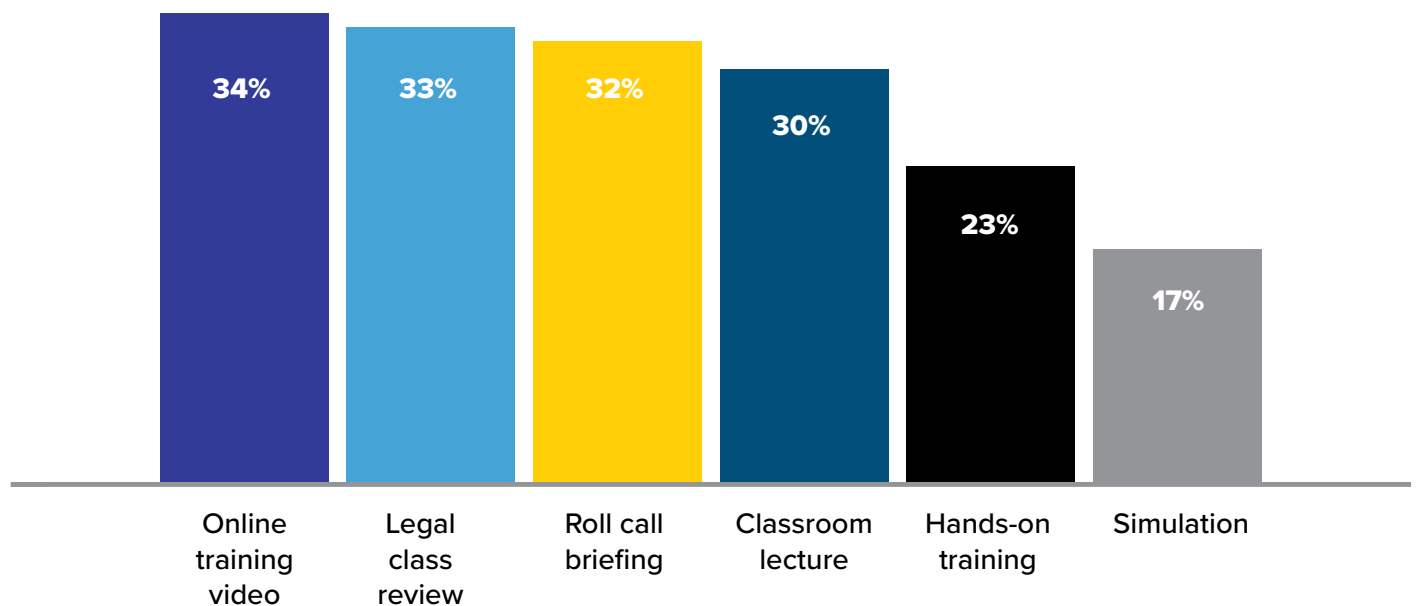
Despite that lack of training, most respondents (84%) indicated they are confident in their ability to handle a non-compliant driver during a traffic stop.

We asked a series of questions regarding the type of training respondents had received regarding responding to non-compliant drivers during traffic stops.

Only a quarter (24%) had received hands-on training in removing a non-compliance driver from their vehicle, 35% have completed simulator or hands-on training on using less lethal tools (i.e., pepper spray or an ECW) with a non-compliant driver, and 37% have completed simulation or range training on reacting to a driver or vehicle occupant who shoots from the vehicle.

We asked respondents for their recommendations for other police officers to improve officer safety and reduce liability risks when stopping a non-compliant driver. We compiled the top responses and themes in the sidebar, “Improving officer safety and reducing risk during non-compliant traffic stops.”

SINCE JANUARY 1, 2019, WHAT TYPE OF TRAINING METHOD HAVE YOU RECEIVED FOR TRAFFIC STOPS WITH NON-COMPLIANT DRIVERS?



IMPROVING OFFICER SAFETY AND REDUCING RISK DURING NON-COMPLIANT TRAFFIC STOPS

As part of the survey, we asked respondents for their recommendations to improve officer safety and reduce risks when stopping a non-compliant driver.

We compiled the top responses and themes for handy review:

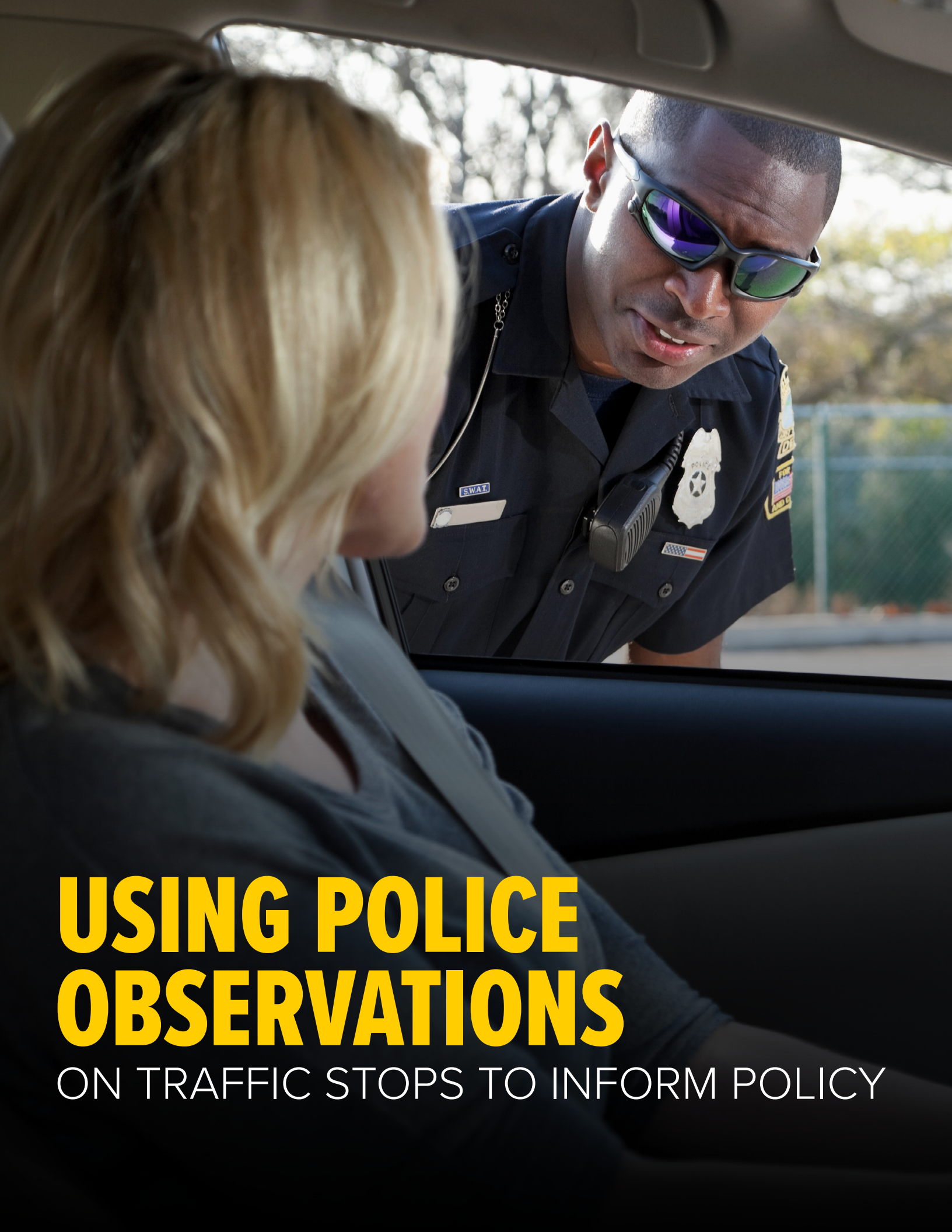
- **Request backup:** As soon as you become aware of non-compliance, request a secondary backup unit to start heading your way. If you can de-escalate and gain compliance great. If things head south, then your backup is closer than they would've been.
- **Don't get tunnel vision:** If someone is getting heated with you and there are multiple occupants in the car, don't get tunnel vision regarding who you are having the conversation with. He may be distracting you so another occupant in the car can ambush you.
- **Call out the driver:** I trained the department to stop walking up to vehicles on traffic stops. Call out the drivers in most instances if possible. Conduct the stop at the front of the patrol vehicle. This allows officers to view possible weapons, and to verify that the driver will initially comply.
- **Disengage if necessary:** Don't get too aggressive where you may be injured. It's not worth it. Maintain control of yourself and your emotions. There is nothing wrong with disengaging with a person if you can't maintain control of the situation without the use of force when it may be perceived as excessive. Don't be embarrassed if someone gets away from you. It happens to the best of us. This isn't a football game. As professional law enforcement officers, we are graded by the public mainly when we hurt someone, how much AND when we lose our tempers or composure. They don't really care when people get away from us.
- **Give the driver time:** Allow time for a non-compliant driver to make his or her decision on how the encounter will end. I believe they will understand that once other officers arrive on scene they may have to make different decisions.
- **No single officer units:** No departments should have single officer units. We learn the buddy system when we are kids to go to the bathroom. There is no better application for it than law enforcement. The sheer command presence of two officers will deter many non-compliance issues and provide immediate assistance for the ones it does not.
- **Consider your positioning:** Always be in control and request the driver to exit the vehicle and conduct an exterior pat-down. Place yourself between the driver and vehicle if the driver is the only occupant and do not allow them to return to the vehicle until the stop is complete.
- **Watch their shoulders:** From the moment you activate your lights to when you begin your approach watch their shoulders to see if it looks like they're reaching for something or tucking something away. Always check the back seat and keep tabs on passengers who refuse to interact with you. When feasible have your backer set up on the opposite side of the vehicle so that the two of you have a better position to fire on the vehicle should one of the subjects use or attempt to use a gun or other deadly weapon. This also lets your backer keep an eye on the passenger's hands and movements.
- **Let the driver leave:** If you know who the driver is (via NCIC or JNET, etc.) and have good vehicle and driver information let them leave and file the citations. No use getting into an argument on the side of the road for no reason.
- **Sovereign citizen response:** If there are any signs that the driver is a [sovereign citizen](#), call for backup and give your specific location. Broadcast a description of the driver, the vehicle color and make, tag number, and number of known occupants and their descriptions. You have to know where the hell you are to get help.

- **Stay vigilant:** Approach each situation as a «felony stop» (stay vigilant) until determined otherwise.
- **Quickly remove the subject:** Arrest if there is a valid charge and quickly remove the subject from the scene. Delayed transport of the subject increases the chance for failure. As soon as the driver is deemed non-compliant, request backup units and refrain from approaching if possible until backup units are on scene. Do not argue with the driver, as the roadside is not a good location for a dispute over any infraction. It is better to maintain composure and not argue than to be writing a use of force report and detailing why the driver became non-compliant.
- **Ask, tell, make:** For example, you ask a driver nicely to step out of the vehicle. If he does not comply you tell him to get out. If he does not comply you make him using the least amount of force necessary. This can go from ask to make quickly depending on the driver. If you give the driver time to think about a plan or have time to call someone or reach for a gun, you are always on the defense.
- **Consider the time:** Be aware of the subject attempting to buy time through passive resistance. This gives the subject time to formulate a plan.
- **Always be professional:** If they deserve a ticket or talk themselves into one leave it at that and know you ultimately still win the situation. If they do not pay the ticket, then catch them on their warrant at another time. It is a win-win for the police officer. Make sure you activate cameras and do not let your pride get in the way.
- **Slow down:** Do not feel rushed in getting up to the driver to make contact. Watch all occupants for furtive movements and scan the vehicle. A non-compliant driver will give indicators before you make contact, such as looking for you as you approach or mouthing anger to themselves or passengers about the stop. Knowing they are non-compliant prior to making contact affords you time to change your approach and/or request assistance if needed.
- **Avoid use of force:** Do not physically escalate attempts to detain non-compliant drivers for traffic offenses, non-violent crimes or non-violent warrants. If the person resists and flees on foot or by vehicle, file a summons for the appropriate charges and pursue only within the parameters of your agency's pursuit policy.
- **Do not get dragged:** Do not under any circumstances choose to continue the fight with a traffic offender to remove them from a vehicle if it appears they are able to start the vehicle and attempt to drive away. [Do not choose to place yourself in danger of being run over or dragged](#) or necessitate an escalation of force or deadly force over a traffic issue. If they are going to drive off, you can choose to pursue or place them in custody later.
- **Train, train, train:** Even if your department doesn't offer training constantly throughout the year, take it upon yourself to utilize training modules through [Police1](#) or other in-service training providers and request to be sent to training. Practice certain approaches and tactics with compliant drivers that won't come off as aggressive policing to build a platform on how to approach a vehicle. Request supervisors permit the use of older patrol vehicles to run mock scenarios on off days and create a team bonding/pot luck situation to raise morale in the unit/shift/watch.
- **Record the stop:** If no dashcam or bodycam is available, at least [use your cellphone](#) for recording purposes. Know your case law and your legal options.
- **Think before you act:** Make a decision based on ALL the circumstances placed in front of you and don't just react to the first thing you see. De-escalate in every situation you can. Most drivers are not the nightmare scenario that the police academy taught you. If you stay calm and composed, you (the officer) will always be in control of the stop and will be much safer than if you allow your emotions or your ego to dictate your actions during the stop. No matter what the driver does or says, you (the officer) must stay calm and be professional. **P1**)



About the author

Nancy Perry is Editor-in-Chief of Police1 and Corrections1, responsible for defining original editorial content, tracking industry trends, managing expert contributors and leading execution of special coverage efforts.



USING POLICE OBSERVATIONS

ON TRAFFIC STOPS TO INFORM POLICY

Responses from a Police1 survey of more than 1,000 LEOs should be a critical element of the national dialog concerning traffic stops

By Bob Harrison

If 2020 was the great undoing for the police and the people they serve, 2021 and beyond has been a time of examining and changing the role of the police.

There have been calls to disarm, defund, reimagine and repurpose the police. Some advocacies suggest moving critical functions away from undertrained police employing force to control those in a mental health crisis. Some favor lessening the frequency of enforcement contacts in general. Others call for merely hitting “delete” to end a variety of police practices and duties. One function in this “full stop” future is to [end police traffic stops](#).

Against this backdrop of change, [Police1 conducted a survey of those who make these stops](#) – officers themselves – to find out what they thought. Are they making fewer contacts with drivers? When they do, are drivers less cooperative? Do cops feel they are adequately trained to perform this duty and respond effectively if a traffic stop degrades into violence?

These responses from more than 1,000 police professionals are a critical element of the dialog concerning traffic stops, and can inform policymakers as they answer this question: Should the police continue to conduct traffic stops?

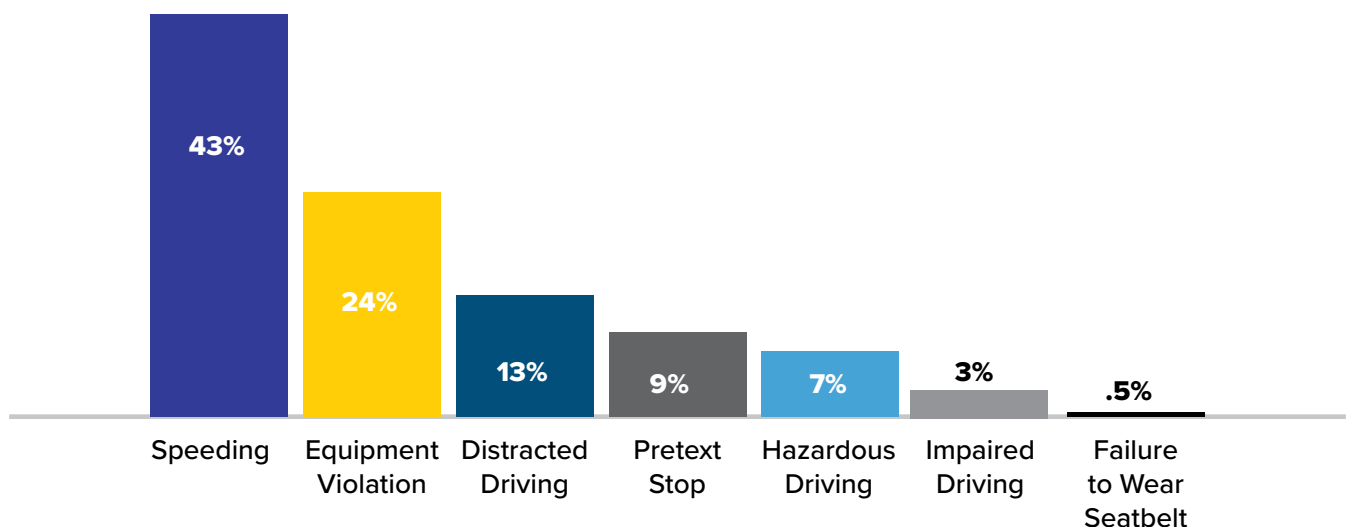
THE CONTEXT

Traffic stops are the most prevalent way the police have contact with the public. In 2018, for example, the police contacted 61.5 million persons ages 16 and older. Of that number, 25 million were drivers or passengers in a traffic stop (7.9 million more were contacted as a result of traffic collisions). [1]

Although the prevention of damage, death and injury that results from unlawful driving supports the need for traffic enforcement, racial disparities in who the police stop make it a flashpoint for those who want to end the practice. As research continues to show widespread racial disparities of those stopped, it is increasingly seen as a practice that, if stopped, would serve the cause of social justice. [2]

In response to these issues, boards and councils have begun to remove certain duties and responsibilities from the police, including [limiting their ability to conduct routine traffic stops](#) for equipment or registration violations. [3] Although

RANK THE MOST COMMON REASON FOR TRAFFIC STOPS IN YOUR JURISDICTION



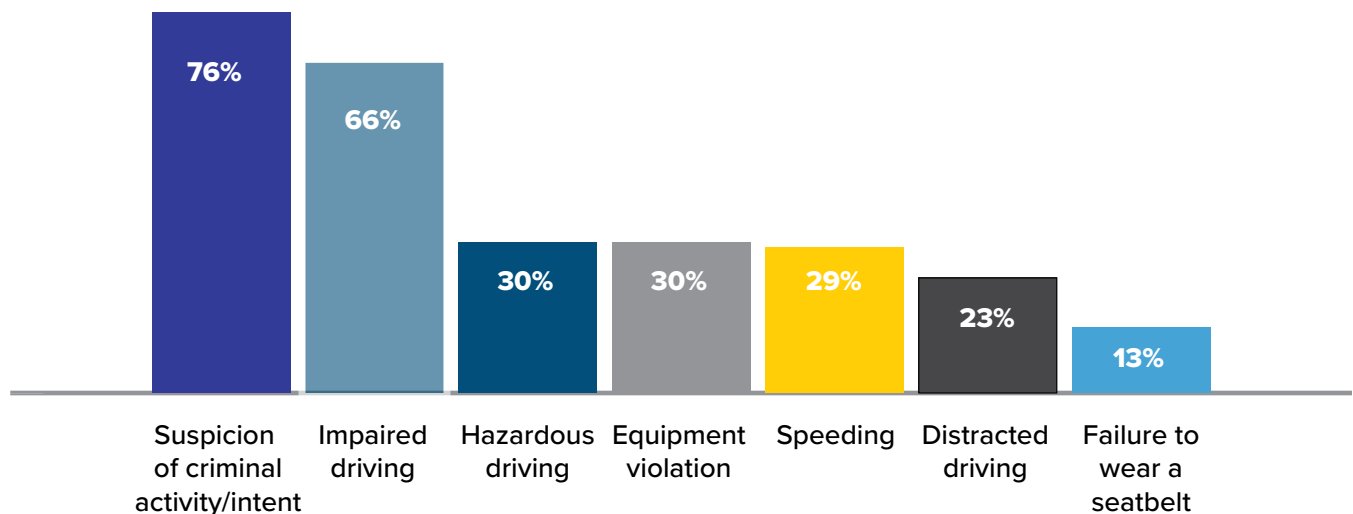
the police largely support moving mental health and homeless services to professionals trained in those services, [4] the practice of stopping those who violate traffic laws (or use traffic laws as a pretext to investigate suspected criminal behavior) does not yet enjoy such widespread support, as is seen in Police1’s survey. In addition to that perspective, the survey addresses several important issues police leaders should consider.

THE SURVEY

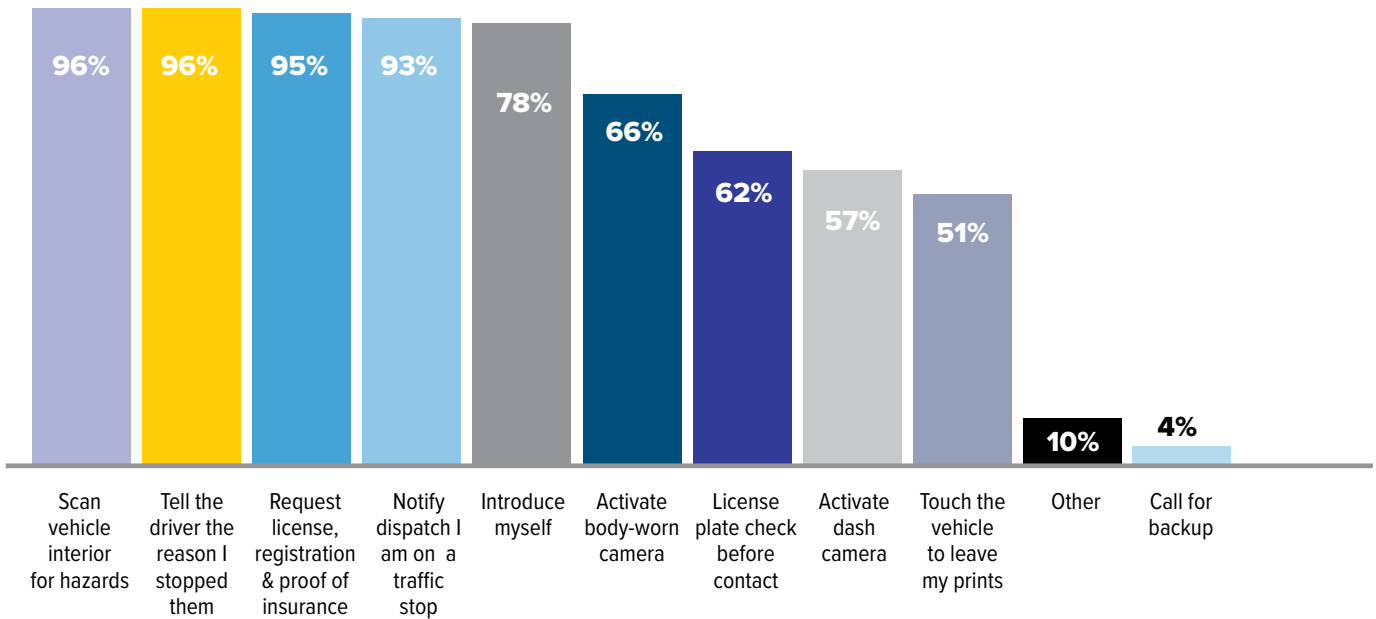
From April 22, 2021, to May 4, 2021, a total of 1,036 police officers or deputies who work in patrol completed Police1’s online survey. Several key issues stand out:

- When asked about the most common reasons for a traffic stop, speeding was unsurprisingly the top choice at 43%. Interestingly, equipment violations were second with 24% selecting it as their top reason for the stop. Suspicion of criminal activity, at 9%, was far lower at number six of reasons provided.
- Although suspicion of criminal activity was low on the list of reasons traffic stops were initiated, it was the most prevalent reason the officer encountered non-compliance, at 76%.
- Supporting the general data on speeding nationally, 42% reported that speeding had increased in their communities.
- Almost 60% of officers (611) said they were less likely to stop the vehicle than before the experiences of 2020.
- When they stop a vehicle, 57% activate the vehicle’s dash cam, and 66% activate their body cam (no data on the agency requiring activation was sought); 93% said they notified dispatch they were on a traffic stop at the time it occurred.
- Although 513 respondents noted that driver cooperation had remained about the same, 504 said it had worsened. The highest levels of non-compliance were those suspected of drug or alcohol influence, and persons suspected of criminal conduct.
- The most prevalent non-compliant driver behavior was not following the officer’s commands (42%), followed by not responding to the officer’s questions (24%).
- Almost 80% said their agency had not altered their traffic stop policies to address driver non-compliance.

IN YOUR EXPERIENCE, WHICH TYPES OF TRAFFIC STOPS ARE MOST LIKELY TO RESULT IN NON-COMPLIANCE (Respondents could select multiple answers)

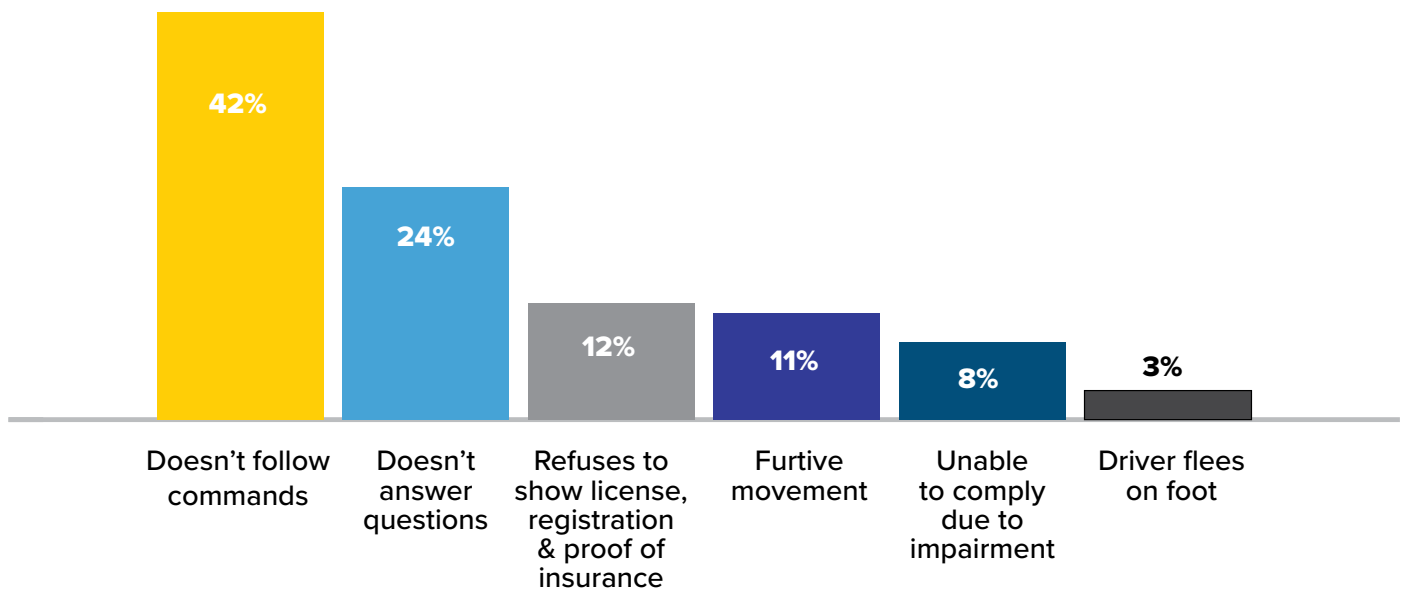


WHICH OF THESE DO YOU DO AT EVERY TRAFFIC STOP, EITHER BY PERSONAL HABIT OR DEPARTMENT POLICY REQUIREMENT?



- Eighty-seven percent said they do not support proposals that reduce the role of the police to enforce traffic laws.
- About 42% said their department has never provided traffic stop training; 50% more said it occurs yearly. The remaining 8% noted they received weekly or more frequent training.
- Only 6% strongly agree that they have received adequate training for traffic stops involving non-compliant drivers; 46% disagree or strongly disagree. At the same time, more than 83% agree or strongly agree that they are confident in their ability to handle such an instance.
- Since January 2019, 75% report they have not received any hands-on training about

WHAT IS THE MOST COMMON NON-COMPLIANCE BEHAVIOR YOU ENCOUNTER?



removing a non-compliant driver from a vehicle; 35% say they have received simulator or hands-on training on the use of less lethal tools with a non-compliant driver.

For those considering change, the inferences one can draw are that the police largely believe they should retain the duty to enforce traffic laws, even as the driving public becomes less compliant. Even in the absence of appropriate training, most also believe they can handle a non-compliant driver should the occasion arise.

Interestingly, a majority of officers reported they were less likely to stop vehicles than in the past. That data is consistent with what some see as depolicing as officers elect to refrain from contact even when a violation is present. The issue of pretext stops is also significant. Although *Whren v. United States* (517 US 806 (1996)) affirmed the practice of using a vehicle code violation as a pretext for a traffic stop, its use is increasingly controversial, and has been linked by some to traffic stops for “driving while Black.” [5]

IMPLICATIONS OF LIMITING POLICE TRAFFIC STOPS

Although limiting the frequency of contacts with drivers would statistically make those (not) stopped and the officers (not) stopping them safer, there are greater implications of ceasing general traffic enforcement. Even as the police contact fewer persons of color, thus lowering the frequency of instances of a contact based on racial profiling, is the greater good served by removing traffic stops as a means for the police to make contact with the public?

Annual miles driven has increased throughout the United States since 1970, topping out at the end of 2019 at 3,269 million miles. By February 2021, the total had dropped 30% to 2,772 million miles. Despite driving less, the 24% increase in the rate of motor vehicle deaths in 2020 was the largest since 1924 with 42,060 people dying in crashes. [6] One theory is that with fewer cars on the road, risky driving behaviors went up, with a noticeable increase in speeding as emptier roads (and fewer cops free to perform routine patrol or traffic

duties?) allowed drivers to go as fast as they might wish. [7] The COVID-19 pandemic does provide a case study of driving in the absence of the police. As can be seen, absent other factors, deaths and injuries increase significantly. Beyond traffic enforcement, there are implications for the larger system of traffic safety.

The divergence between total collisions and traffic deaths highlights a blind spot in traffic engineering, which historically depends on lowering the instances of collisions to lower death rates. In the period shortly after stay-at-home orders were issued in California, minor injury crashes fell by 29%, while the rate of severe injury and fatal collisions increased by 14%. [8] This leads to the conclusion that removing enforcement from the “Engineering, Enforcement, Education” safety triad might also translate to the need for significant modifications of roadways to make them safer. One aspect of engineering has been the use of automated traffic violation detection systems (red light cameras and similar technologies). Although those means have seen some success in altering driver behaviors and improving safety, the public, in general, doesn’t like them, and systems have been removed in cities even though they resulted in significant declines in red-light violations. [9]

One issue not yet in general discourse is the emerging impact of [autonomous vehicles](#) (AV). As AV become ubiquitous, the controversies about police traffic stops will largely be moot. Vehicles not violating traffic laws won’t be stopped; those not crashing into one another will also avoid police scrutiny. In an AV future, 19 million traffic stops won’t occur, nor will almost all of the 7.9 million collisions. Forty fewer officers a year will die in collisions, and police staffing (and funding) can largely be redirected to other purposes. Pretext stops (about 4% of traffic stops [10]) may still happen, but likely at decreasing frequency. Looking at deaths at the hands of the police and racial justice issues, the police will also stop killing more than a hundred people a year in traffic stops. [11]

As much as the idea of abandoning traffic stops might seem illogical to the police, an AV future could cause that to happen sooner rather than later. As it stands, officer safety concerns and serving the greater good might mean there's no need to wait for autonomous vehicles to end the practice – it could already be gone by the time they dominate the roadways.

CONSIDERATIONS

Looking at the context of police traffic stops and the insights of officers in the survey may lead to reform for the police and their stakeholders as they work to create a mutually beneficial future for traffic and community safety. Among these are three ways to alter police practice to eliminate unwarranted intrusion into the lives of their citizenry, and also practices that enhance the safety of officers on the streets:

1. The first consideration is to capture the data about traffic stops in your jurisdiction and then act on that information. California's [Racial & Identity Profiling Act \(RIPA\)](#) reporting requirements will soon apply to every traffic stop in that state. [12] Other states and likely federal action may create a similar mandate for all. As it does, policymakers can base subsequent legislation on data instead of supposition. Agencies could also seek to match the appearance and perceived identity of persons stopped for suspected criminal conduct against the appearance of persons the public reports as being responsible for criminal conduct, another way to assess the frequency of stops for that purpose against the actual crime data in that community.
2. A second consideration is to [use the outcomes of the Police1 survey](#) to engage officers and the public to discern levels of local support for the continuance (or alteration) of police responsibilities for traffic enforcement. These conversations can address both an officer's reluctance to stop vehicles as well as issues of racial profiling, procedural justice and the concerns of many

who want to lower the frequency of police-involved shootings of Black and Latino men. One core issue to resolve in this work is to address the racial disparities found in the RIPA report and other national data, especially in pretext stops and traffic stops for minor violations. The police should consider how they want to participate in that dialog, and whether ending some traffic stop practices is something they want to support. [13]

3. A final consideration is to address officer proficiency in dealing with persons who are non-compliant. Although the survey specifically addresses traffic stops, it could also apply to almost any contact the police have with the public. Officers feel they are ready to handle such a circumstance; this presumption may be in error, and not discovered until it is too late. Agencies could develop or enhance existing training to deal with opportunities to improve the ways officers manage a non-compliant driver, especially if it progresses to a stage where the person will be taken into custody. Trained skills in voice command, arrest and control techniques that do not involve weapons and de-escalation skills could be taught and tested until they can be employed without delay.

Even with these recommendations in place, the question remains – should the police make traffic stops? Managed well, and administered without prejudice, the answer could be yes – mostly to limit the carnage brought about by collisions and control of the speeds and erratic driving on American roadways. Could the police be much better trained so instances of profile stops and subsequent police-perpetrated violence also decline? That answer may also be yes. Should the police and their public also plan for a future that doesn't include traffic stops? With increasing numbers of vehicles that are near-autonomous already on our roadways, that answer might also be yes. **P1**)

REFERENCES

1. Harrell E, Davis E. [Contacts between police and the public, 2018 – Statistical Tables](#). US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. NCJ 255730, December 2020.
2. Doyle L, Nembhard S. [Police traffic stops have little to do with public safety](#). Urban Wire: Crime and Justice. The blog of the Urban Institute, April 26, 2021.
3. Vaughan J. [Berkeley City Council passes sweeping reforms to limit police traffic stops](#). The Appeal, February 23, 2021.
4. Vermeer M, Woods D, Jackson BA. [Would law enforcement leaders support defunding the police? Probably – if communities ask police to solve fewer problems](#). RAND Corporation Perspective, August 2020.
5. Harris DA. [“Driving while Black” and all other traffic offenses: The Supreme Court and pretextual traffic stops](#). The Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology, 1997, 87:2.
6. Hurd B. [US traffic deaths rose in 2020 despite significant decline in road travel](#). MSN.com autoblog, March 4, 2021.
7. Domonoske C. [Tragic: driving was down in 2020, but fatality rates surged](#). NPR.org, March 5, 2021.
8. Bliss L. [The emptier roads of 2020 were more lethal](#). Bloomberg CityLab, March 9, 2021.
9. [Rejecting red light cameras in L.A.](#) (staff). Los Angeles Times, June 9, 2011.
10. Zagorsky J. [Cops may feel the biggest impact from the driverless car revolution](#). The Ohio State University, Jay Zagorsky’s Research & Blog, March 16, 2015.
11. Evelyn K, Jang I. [Police killed 121 people in traffic stops last year. Advocates call to ban them in fight for racial justice](#). Insider, April 30, 2021.
12. Racial and Identity Profiling Advisory (RIPA) Board. [RIPA Annual Report, 2021](#).
13. Mercer M. [Police “pretext” traffic stops need to end, some lawmakers say](#). Pew Trust, September 3, 2020.

About the author

Bob Harrison is a retired police chief who is an adjunct researcher with the non-profit, non-partisan RAND Corporation. He is also a course manager for the CA POST Command College. Bob consults with police agencies in California and beyond on strategy, leadership and innovation. He holds a Postgraduate Degree in Business Strategy & Innovation from the University of Oxford, and master’s degrees from two U.S. universities.





ESSENTIAL SAFETY TACTICS

FOR THE FOUR
PRIMARY
PHASES OF A
TRAFFIC STOP

Practicing and mentally rehearsing strategies to enhance safety is one of an officer's most essential responsibilities

By Tyson Kilbey

Virtually every law enforcement agency faces the challenge of teaching their officers tactics and strategies to keep themselves safe during the performance of traffic stops. Every officer who has completed a police academy has been shown the outcomes from traffic stops that resulted in tragedy. Unfortunately, because of the volume of traffic contacts that many officers make throughout their careers, it can be easy to fall victim to complacent tendencies that jeopardize the officer's safety and the safety of the subject being stopped and their occupants.

This article breaks down essential safety tactics for the four primary phases of a traffic stop. These phases are sometimes recognized as the vehicle in motion, the initial contact, roadside investigation and the disposition of the encounter. Each of the four phases encompasses tactical opportunities to reduce risk and save lives with solid tactics and principles.

PHASE 1: VEHICLE IN MOTION

The first phase of most traffic stops is frequently referred to as the vehicle in motion – precisely, the officer's observations of a car before initiating the traffic stop.

There are a few tactics that can dramatically increase officer safety during this phase.

First, if possible, the officer should run the license plate through dispatch and get a return before advancing to the initial contact. A stolen vehicle or return of a wanted person is vital information that could change the approach altogether and almost certainly warrant the call for a backing officer to respond.

Choosing the location of the stop is another tactic that should be considered in this phase. There is no requirement to stop the vehicle at the exact spot where the violation occurred. However, following the car to a safer stop location gives

the officer more time to run the license plate and determine a location that offers a more significant tactical advantage. These advantages include increased lighting, broader shoulders on the side of the road and closer proximity to major roadways, allowing for a quicker response time from backup officers.

Finally, during the vehicle in motion phase, the officer should try to observe things such as how long it takes the driver to respond to lights and sirens, and whether they activate or leave on their blinker. In addition, the officer should look for excessive movement in the vehicle and determine how many occupants are in the car. None of these things by itself constitute an imminent threat to the officer, but as two or more of these potential risk factors begin to accumulate, so should the officer's awareness of the risks.

What we know: 95% of respondents to Police1's traffic stop safety survey request the driver's license, registration and proof of registration.

PHASE 2: THE INITIAL CONTACT

Phase two of a traffic stop is the initial contact.

Assuming the encounter is not a felony car stop in which the occupants are ordered to exit the vehicle one at a time at gunpoint, the following primary tactical consideration is the approach to the car.

Many officers choose a driver-side approach, while others frequently use a passenger-side approach. I believe a strategic combination of both styles is an effective strategy.

If most officers chose to use only one method, the effectiveness of that approach would decline. The fact that officers can use both options allows for some uncertainty on the part of a suspect in a vehicle who may have the intention to attack the officer on approach.

When approaching the passenger side, there is a greater chance of surprising the vehicle's occupants with your presence. It generally provides enhanced safety to the officer from roadway traffic.



Approaching from the driver's side allows for a more direct route, and with proper positioning behind the B pillar between the front and rear door, the officer can gain a visual vantage point into the car. This also makes it more difficult for the driver to engage the officer with a weapon without substantially turning their body. Furthermore, this will require the driver to hand important documents outside the vehicle rather than causing the officer to reach into the car.

On a final note, the officer should make it a consistent practice to leave their dominant hand free of extraneous items so that they can draw their handgun quicker in the case of a deadly force threat.

What we know: 51% of officers told Police1 they touch the vehicle as they approach to leave their prints.

PHASE 3: THE ROADSIDE INVESTIGATION

Phase three of a traffic stop is the roadside investigation.

For many stops, this phase can be as brief as a license and registration check, along with writing a citation or warning. In others, this could include

standard field sobriety tests or a probable cause or consent search of the vehicle.

There are many safety tactics to employ during this phase, but the most important include calling for backup when needed and recognizing when running subjects from outside the vehicle is more advantageous than sitting in the patrol car. It is also critical to pay attention to the driver or occupants' verbal and non-verbal body language clues.

What we know: Non-compliance is most likely and most dangerous during the investigation. Not following commands is the most common non-compliance behavior and is a red flag for danger.

PHASE 4: THE DISPOSITION

Phase four of a traffic stop is the disposition. This could mean anything from a warning, a citation, or an arrest of the driver or passenger.

In the case of an arrest, the officer's awareness level should be the most elevated. If possible, a backing officer should be present.

Second, it is wise not to tell the driver of a vehicle they are under arrest while still in their car and risk them driving off rapidly. Instead, ask

the driver to step out and speak with you at a safer location. This could generally be on the passenger side of the vehicle. Doing this will keep everyone on the scene safer from traffic while not affording the driver a direct route back into their car if they decide to flee the scene.

There are many other tactics and strategies officers have effectively employed over the years. Each stop brings inherent risks and practicing and mentally rehearsing strategies to enhance safety is one of an officer's most essential responsibilities. Train hard and be safe!

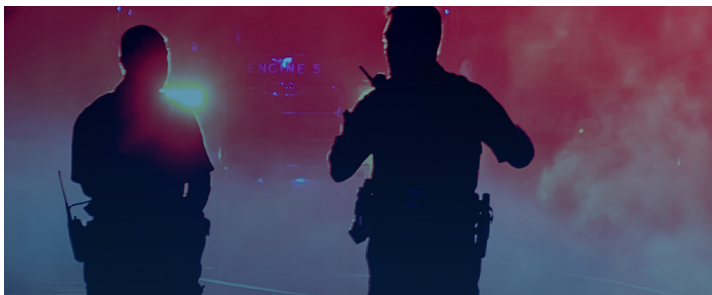
What we know: Regular training is critical for high-frequency activities like traffic stops. Forty-two percent of survey respondents don't receive annual training from their department. P1

About the author

Tyson Kilbey has more than 25 years of experience in law enforcement, consisting of three years as a hotel security supervisor and 22 years as a deputy sheriff for the Johnson County Kansas Sheriff's Office. He has worked in the detention, patrol and training divisions, SWAT and accident investigation units. He is currently a captain for the Sheriff's Office. Tyson owns [Top Firearms Instruction, LLC](#), and authored "[Personal Defense Mastery](#)," a follow-up to his first book "[Fundamental Handgun Mastery](#)."



MORE POLICE1 RESOURCES



TECHNIQUES FOR DEALING WITH THE DIFFICULT TRAFFIC OFFENDER

To avoid being ticketed, the difficult driver will engage in a disjointed combination of negotiations, rebuttals, compliments and insults.



TRAFFIC STOP EXTENDED, BUT DETENTION WAS LAWFUL

The court determines if law enforcement completed a lawful detention though the traffic stop was extended.

Explore more findings from Police1 Research



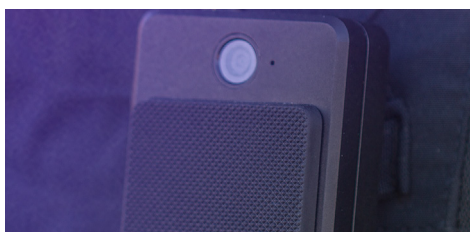
Read more about officer safety



Get grants help for police technology



Police1.com Newsletter



Police Product Deals



Police Training Videos

ABOUT THE SPONSOR

[Zebra Technologies](#) has worked with public safety agencies for more than 20 years to design mobility solutions that best serve the unique, mission-critical communication and data needs of first responders and public safety professionals. The enterprise-grade power, security, flexibility and versatility of the Zebra mobile computing and accessory ecosystem make it easy for fire and rescue organizations to scale mobile workflows

and boost efficiency, and Zebra mobile computing solutions are built to withstand nearly any hazardous condition or environmental extreme for years without fail. Visit www.zebra.com to learn how our rugged mobility solutions can support your public safety mission.





Learn more about officer safety, traffic stop tactics
and training on [Police1.com](https://www.police1.com).

[POLICE1.COM](https://www.police1.com)