

Norfolk Insider

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“Traffic Laws Apply to the Police”

by Chief of Police Bill Mizner, City of Norfolk



The Norfolk Police Division will occasionally receive a call from a citizen wanting to report an officer thought to have broken a traffic law. The officer may not have stopped completely at a stop sign, neglected to use the turn signal, or was exceeding the speed limit. The caller will emphasize that the officer should be upholding the law, not breaking it.

I absolutely agree that traffic regulations apply to law enforcement officers. State law and City Code require officers driving a government-owned vehicle to comply with traffic laws, unless otherwise exempted. City of Norfolk policy and Police Division general orders also require obedience to the traffic laws. Obeying traffic laws is stressed during an officer's initial training and in-service training thereafter.

When officers are patrolling or responding to a routine call, they are expected to obey all traffic laws. When officers respond to an emergency call, with or without emergency equipment activated, they are exempted by law from the provisions of many of the traffic laws. These include stopping, standing or parking, disregarding direction of movement or turning in specified directions, proceeding through stop lights or stop signs, and exceeding the speed limit. This does not, however, relieve the officer from the duty to drive with due regard for the safety of all persons. Officers must continuously evaluate road, traffic, and weather conditions and their ability to control their vehicles under adverse circumstances.

Occasionally an officer will be involved in a traffic collision. When this happens, the officer's supervisor will investigate the collision. If the investigation determines that the officer committed a traffic violation, the officer is subject to enforcement action as well as disciplinary action.

Our officers go through annual emergency vehicle operations training and are very knowledgeable of the traffic laws. They understand that the community expects those who enforce the law will also obey it. Wearing the badge is an honor and privilege given to us by the citizens of Norfolk, not a license to violate the law.