



# DODGE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Dale J Schmidt Sheriff    Scott Smith Chief Deputy

## Simple Rules to Help Law Enforcement Keep Everyone Safe

From time to time, law enforcement struggles with various inappropriate reactions to law enforcement activities. I think back to when I first started and attempted to stop an elderly driver who was not driving very well. She failed to stop for several blocks even though I was following her with lights and sirens on at 15 mph. It wasn't until I got on the public address system and instructed her to pull over that she finally stopped. When I went to talk to her, she told me she didn't know she needed to stop for police cars. As shocking as that sounds, it is more common that you may think for vehicles to fail to yield the right of way to emergency vehicles.

Let's start with that law. When an emergency vehicle approaches you from any direction, you are required by law to pull over to the right of the street or highway and come to a stop. The only exception is when driving on a divided highway like highway 151 and you are on the opposite side of the median. The basic rule of thumb is if you see an emergency vehicle, immediately pull over to the right and stop as quickly and safely as possible until they pass you. Someone's life could depend on it. Not doing so can result in an expensive citation mailed to you later.

Next, common sense would suggest that if a law enforcement officer is parked on the side of the road with their emergency lights on, that is not the time to make conversation with them or ask what is going on. However, all too often that is exactly what happens. Those people need to keep in mind that there is a reason that we have our lights on and it may not always be apparent what that reason is. Certainly you should never approach a squad car that has someone stopped on a traffic stop, as a traffic stop is never routine and at any time they can turn dangerous. Please keep your distance. Flag us down after we are done or simply call our non-emergency number if you have questions. Our focus needs to be on the subject(s) we are dealing with for everyone's safety.

Another common issue we run into is dealing with drivers when we have to detour traffic. We understand that detours are inconvenient but when we divert traffic it is for a legitimate and likely serious issue. Many times we are asked by motorists if they can get through even though we are blocking off traffic. I can tell you that likely the answer is going to be no. We respectfully ask that you simply listen to the officer directing traffic and find an alternative route.

Finally, what should you do if you see squad cars pull up to a house in your neighborhood? Again, we are likely dealing with situations ranging from neighborhood disputes to people with weapons or other dangerous incidents. Please keep yourself safe by not congregating in the area. Recently I was at an incident that I asked several

neighbors to clear out of their driveway while we were addressing the situation. When it was all over, I was glad I made that request as it had turned out that those neighbors were directly in harm's way and they never even knew it.

These simple rules to follow will not only make our job easier but likely will keep you safe. I thank you all for your support in recent months as we truly appreciate it. It is our pleasure as public servants to protect our community as we work to keep Dodge County a safe place to live, work and visit.

Sheriff Dale J. Schmidt