



DODGE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Dale J Schmidt Sheriff Scott Mittelstadt Chief Deputy

August Sheriff Column – Please Avoid Being an Emergency Scene Onlooker

It is human nature for anyone who sees emergency vehicles and personnel in action to be curious about what is going on. Onlookers are quite common and I have seen a number of them at various scenes over the last few weeks. There are various degrees of onlookers, from those who are simply driving by trying to watch what is going on, to those who physically pull over and get out of their cars to watch first responders in action.

I respectfully ask that if you find yourself in the area of an emergency scene that you do your best to refrain from taking more than a quick glance as you're driving by. There are dangers of not paying attention to the road or not paying attention to those directing traffic. It is crucially important that you are observant and paying attention to what is in front of you and around you when navigating through or around these emergency scenes. It is not uncommon for a crash to occur that is unrelated to the primary incident as a result of someone not paying attention.

Emergency lights and sirens are tools that we use to alert drivers that we are approaching and drivers are required to yield the right of way to emergency vehicles while we are responding to emergency incidents. As I respond to emergency incidents, I have found that through the years it has grown increasingly difficult to navigate through traffic. Many drivers pay more attention to the approaching incident, their cell phone, their radio and other distractions than to the other traffic around them. As a reminder, when an emergency vehicle approaches from the rear it is your obligation to pull over to the right and stop. To comply with this law you must first be paying attention to what's going on around you. It is quite alarming how many people never see an emergency vehicle approaching and fail to yield.

I have also been at emergency scenes in the last couple of weeks in which many onlookers encroached on the scene of the incident. They were also in a position to view victims of those incidents which we as first responders do our best to protect for the dignity and respect of those victims. We also must protect the privacy of those victims by law. Furthermore, by encroaching upon a scene and standing within the perimeter of law enforcement, fire and EMS vehicles you risk contaminating a crime scene without even knowing it.

For your safety, for the integrity of investigations and out of sheer respect for those individuals involved, I ask you to please avoid becoming that onlooker. Individuals who choose not to comply with this request force emergency responders to be pulled away from emergency scenes to deal with those individuals who are too close to the scene. As a result, those emergency responders are not able to focus entirely on their tasks, which could result in tragic consequences. Thank you for your consideration and assistance when approaching these scenes and thank you for helping us to make Dodge County a safe and enjoyable place to live, work and visit.

Sheriff Dale J. Schmidt