



Why Should We Enforce Traffic Laws?
Chief Michael Haigler, Locust Police Department

I would ask that you print the contents of this letter due to constant complaints about officers enforcing traffic laws. This act is not considered minor in nature nor is it an attempt to collect money for towns or quotas.

According to a lot of people, officers are wasting their time making traffic stops for minor traffic violations when we should be out looking for rapists, murderers and other criminals. Here is a little information taken from actual cases and some of you may remember the cases on the national news broadcasts but didn't hear or notice how these criminals were apprehended.

Case #1: Randy Kraft, Arrested for Driving While Impaired on May 14, 1983 in Orange County, California. Kraft was stopped under suspicion of drinking and driving. After failing the roadside tests, Kraft was placed under arrest and his vehicle searched. The body of a young man was found in the front seat of his vehicle. Kraft, an ex-Marine and computer programmer was titled "The Southern California Strangler" and was convicted of the murder of 16 men, mostly Marines, but is a suspect in about 67 murders total.

Case #2: William Lester Suff. Arrested January 9, 1992 in Riverside, California after making and illegal U-turn and having an expired registration. Suff was also driving with a suspended license at the time. Suff had many unpaid parking tickets at that time too. He was detained and detectives noticed his license plate was the same one seen at the dump site of several murder victims in the area. Further investigation convicted Suff of 12 counts of murder spanning seven years. He was also convicted of rape, and mutilation. He is awaiting execution on death row.

Case #3: Theodore "Ted" Bundy, arrested August 16, 1975 for driving without headlights and trying to elude police. He was investigated due to his vehicle matching a description of one used in a kidnapping and this resulted in a conviction for kidnapping. He was transferred to Colorado to stand trial for murder when he escaped. He was again arrested on June 13, 1977 for erratic driving and possession of a stolen car. He escaped again in December of 1977. Bundy was arrested again in Pensacola, Florida for driving a stolen vehicle and was later convicted of several murders in Florida. He was executed on January 24, 1989.

Case #4: David Berkowitz: Arrested in New York in 1977, the "Son of Sam" killer had murdered six men and women and wounded nine others before he was investigated and arrested. The evidence that brought him down? A parking ticket issued to him on the night and at the time of a murder that was left on his vehicle in the parking lot where he killed one of his victims. He was convicted and sentenced to 364 years in prison.

Case #5: Joel Rifkin, stopped on June 28, 1993 for no license plate in Long Island, New York. He attempted to elude arrest and after wrecking, officers arrested him and found a woman's body in the vehicle. After searching his house, officers found blood and a chainsaw in the garage. He was convicted of seven murders and is serving a 183 year sentence.

Case#6: Timothy McVeigh, was stopped for not having a license plate on his vehicle by a State Patrol Officer in Oklahoma and charged with no plate and possession of a loaded firearm hidden in the vehicle. Three days later, the FBI came to get him in connection with the death of 168 people in the Oklahoma City bombing. He was put to death on June 11, 2001.

Case #7: Wayne Williams was cited on May 22, 1981 for illegally stopping on a bridge in Georgia. Two days later, the body of a 27 year old man was found in the river. Williams was the suspect in over 30 murders but was convicted of only two. He was sentenced to life in prison on February 27, 1982. He is still suspect in other murders in the area.

Case #8: Bruce A. Davis was arrested after trying to break into a vehicle and convicted of 32 murders and sentenced to life in prison in West Virginia in 1982.

Case #9: Larry Eyler was dubbed the "Interstate Killer" in 1982 after murdering over 20 boys and men along roads in Kentucky, Indiana and Illinois. An Indian State Patrolman stopped to check on a truck parked illegally on the side of Interstate I-65 and discovered two men near the truck, one tied. A search of the truck found a bloody knife and Eyler was taken into custody for kidnapping and later released on bond. Eyler was later arrested again for murder in Chicago and was sentenced to death by lethal injection. He died from AIDS in 1994 before his sentence was carried out.

Case #10: James E. Swann, Jr. was once referred to as the "Shotgun Stalker" in the area of Washington, D.C. in 1993. On April 19, 1993 a police officer saw Swann run a couple of red lights and when they tried to stop him he ran from police. He was caught and they found the shotgun in his truck that had just been fired. He was later convicted of four murders and 10 attempted murders.

As you can see, officers can stop people who are normal, law abiding citizens that make mistakes. Some are careless and reckless drivers without regard to others safety. And still others are people we would never suspect of more serious crimes. The bottom line is that while a lot of people are not happy with officers enforcing traffic laws, they are the most visible and obvious signs of an active and efficient police force. Drunk driving, aggressive driving, racing and other careless actions by some drivers on the road contribute to more deaths each year in North Carolina alone than all murders in North Carolina.

So the next time you go through a license check or get stopped by an officer and think he or she should be doing something more constructive than traffic stops, think of these examples of the most dangerous and wanted murderers that were caught simply because they were not following simple traffic laws.

We just might solve that break-in or assault or drug crime in a traffic stop in your community.