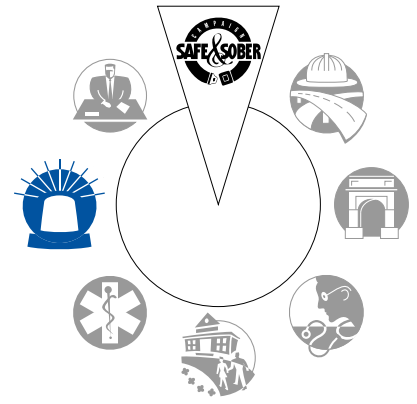


Most people have experienced the “oh no” feeling after seeing a police car in the rear view mirror. Most people hit their brakes, even if they were not speeding. Personal physical reactions and experiences can influence perceptions of traffic enforcement efforts, and often prevent people from realizing its true benefits.



Traffic enforcement is the most recognizable and universal police function. Marked police cars are easy to see and most Americans have been stopped for a traffic violation. Because of the punitive consequences attached to traffic enforcement, many do not have an appreciation for the positive benefits. Additionally, “myths” can result from misconceptions about the goals and motivations of traffic enforcement.

### Myths and Facts

We need to dispel the myths and know the facts.

#### MYTH

All police officers enforce traffic laws.

#### FACT

Because traffic enforcement is so visible, the public perceives that there are a large number of officers enforcing traffic laws. Some agencies have a few officers dedicated to traffic enforcement. However, in most agencies, traffic enforcement is one of many responsibilities most officers perform.

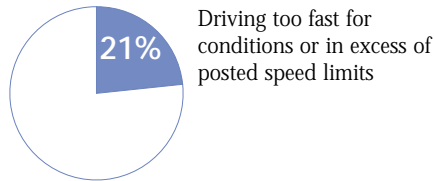
#### MYTH

Traffic officers just write speeding tickets.

#### FACT

Speeding is a serious offense when you examine the facts:

#### Contributing Factors to Fatal Crashes



Source: Traffic Safety Facts 1995, U.S. Department of Transportation

#### FACT

Speeding is one of the most common offenses committed by the aggressive driver.

#### Contributing Factors to Fatal Crashes

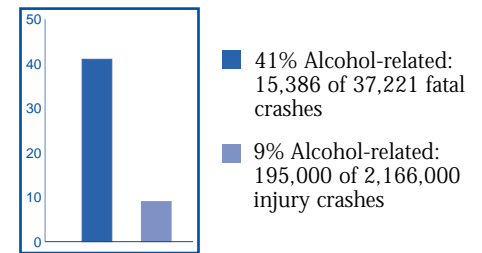


Source: Traffic Safety Facts 1995, U.S. Department of Transportation

#### FACT

Traffic officers remove impaired drivers from the road.

#### Alcohol-Related Fatal and Injury Crashes

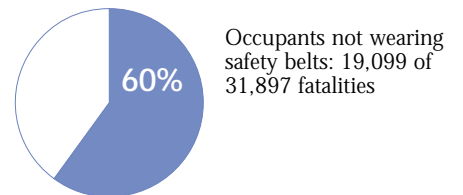
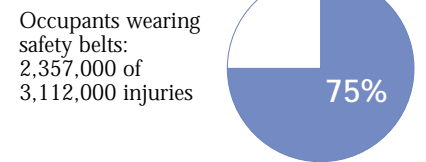


Source: Traffic Safety Facts 1995, U.S. Department of Transportation

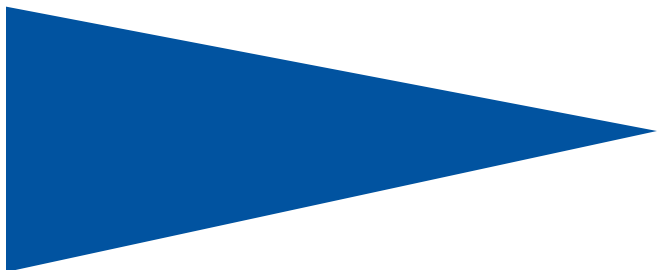
#### FACT

Traffic officers enforce occupant protection laws.

#### Fatalities and Injuries: Occupant Protection Usage



Source: Traffic Safety Facts 1995, U.S. Department of Transportation



# Traffic Enforcement: Myths and Facts

## MYTH

Traffic problems are not that big of a deal.

## FACT

The average American is more likely to be involved in a traffic crash than be a victim of a crime.

### Crime/Crash Clock 1995

- One murder every 24 minutes
- One aggravated assault every 29 seconds
- One violent crime every 18 seconds
- One crime every 2 seconds
- One property crime every 3 seconds
- One fatality every 13 minutes
- One injury every 9 seconds
- One crash every 5 seconds
- One property damage every 7 seconds

Source: Traffic Safety Facts 1995, U.S. Department of Transportation, Crime in the United States, U.S. Department of Justice

## MYTH

If I am injured in a traffic crash, it affects only me.

## FACT

Everyone pays for traffic crashes and the economic costs are significantly more than crime. In 1995, crashes cost Americans \$150 billion. In 1993, personal and property crimes cost Americans \$19 million (Source: The Economic Cost of Motor Vehicle Crashes 1994, U.S. Department of Transportation, Criminal Victimization in the United States 1993, U.S. Department of Justice).

## MYTH

Police officers should be arresting criminals, not writing traffic tickets.

## FACT

Traffic enforcement regularly identifies criminals and results in their apprehension.

- A license plate violation resulted in the apprehension of the suspect in the Oklahoma City federal building bombing.
- During 1994, traffic enforcement stops in Grand Prairie, Texas accounted for 66 percent of all warrant arrests and 50 percent of the arrests made for non-traffic related offenses.
- In Peoria, Illinois, during 1994 and 1995, an increase in traffic enforcement contributed to a six percent decrease in violent crimes and a 12 percent decrease in crashes.

## FACT

Drugs, weapons, contraband, fugitives, and illegal aliens are frequently found in vehicles during "routine" traffic stops.

- During a traffic stop, a Glendale, Arizona officer recovered a stolen vehicle, which led to the location and identification of shops where parts from stolen vehicles were being sold.
- During 1995, through traffic enforcement efforts, the STOP program in San Francisco resulted in 120 felony drug arrests, 84 loaded weapons confiscated, 65 recovered stolen vehicles, 128 other felony arrests, and 153 felony warrants issued.
- In October 1996, two suspects wanted in Ohio for a motel robbery and kidnapping of a motel clerk were apprehended by an Indiana State Trooper after stopping the suspect vehicle for speeding.

- In November 1995, an Albany, New York, police officer stopped a vehicle without a front license plate. The vehicle was stolen and the driver was wanted in connection with a New York City homicide.
- In July 1996, during a routine traffic stop, a Lincoln, Massachusetts, police officer found a shotgun in the vehicle. The shell casings matched those found at the scene of a double homicide. Both occupants were arrested and charged in connection with the murders.

## Support Traffic Enforcement

When you see a car pulled over, remember that the law enforcement officer may be doing more than writing a traffic citation. The officer may be apprehending a felon, child molester, or a murderer, or removing weapons and drugs from your community.

Traffic enforcement can and does contribute to the quality of life in your community.

- Communities can realize the benefits of traffic enforcement and highway safety efforts;
- Roads and neighborhoods will be safer;
- Police agencies can effectively police their communities; and
- Highway safety partners will recognize similar goals and develop cooperative efforts.

## For More Information

Information on crime and traffic enforcement can be obtained through publications from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Traffic Law Enforcement Division, NTS-13, 400 7th Street, SW, Washington, DC 20590.



U.S. Department of Transportation

Additional copies of this piece can be found on NHTSA's web site: <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov>