

Rights and Responsibilities during a Police Stop

The key to avoiding a confrontation with the police is to avoid behaviors that will enable a police officer to stop you or your van in the first place. Anytime you are stopped the police officer then has the opportunity to look inside your van and make a judgment call about their next move. For example, if a police officer stops you for speeding and then smells a hint of marijuana or sees a suspicious item in the van he/she can then claim probable cause to search the van. In almost all police stops the officer will immediately look to the driver as the responsible party even if he/she is not the leader of the trip or the offending party.

Reasons you might be stopped include but are not limited to:

- Dumping garbage in a private dumpster – remember to pack in and pack out all of your own trash
- Excessive speed
- A problem with the vehicle – a taillight or a head light out, low tire pressure, a cracked windshield, etc.
- A seat belt violation – the driver and the passenger not wearing the seatbelt are likely to be ticketed
- Urinating in a public place
- Weaving in and out of lanes

How to behave if you are stopped by the police:

- Be cooperative – demonstrate respect to the officer by saying yes sir/yes mam and no sir/ no mam.
- Be observant – ask the officer for his/her card, take note of his/her name, ask for his/her ID and/or badge number, and note the ID number on the police vehicle.
- Police searches are conducted upon request by the officer when he/she sees something suspicious in plain site or if the officer suspects illegal activity
- If an officer asks to search the vehicle you do not have to say yes, however, understand that saying no might carry consequences – the officer might obtain a search warrant or he/she might seize the vehicle or arrest the offending party.
- If the officer decides to pat down all occupants of the vehicle you have the right to ask for both a male and female officer.
- If you are stopped in a darkened area of the highway or on a country road you have the right to ask to go to the nearest police station or find a more well lit area of roadway.
- **Remember: The best course of action is to always be cooperative then file a complaint after the incident.**

If you are stopped by a police officer notify the Center for Service and Learning immediately after the incident. Call the Center (719) 389-6846, or Elizabeth Pudder, (719) 232-2657 or (H) (719) 390-6987.