

What happens if I'm stopped by an officer of the law?



Pull off to the right side of the roadway and position your vehicle as far out of the lane of traffic as possible. Turn off your engine, radio, tape player, and any other device that might hinder your communication with the officer. Turn on your flashers and the vehicle's interior lights so that the officer can easily see that everything is in order when the stop occurs in darkness. Roll down your window so that you and the officer can communicate.

Remain calm and ask the passengers to remain quiet and calm as well. Keep your safety belt fastened and ask your passengers to keep their seat belts fastened as well, until the officer sees you wearing them. Stay in your seat and do not get out of the vehicle unless the officer asks you to exit the vehicle.

Keep your hands in plain view, preferably on the steering wheel, and ask your passengers to keep their hands in plain view as well, such as on their laps. Do not make any movement that might be interpreted by the officer that you are hiding or searching for something.

Carry proper identification: a valid driver's license, proof of vehicle registration, and proof of insurance. If the officer asks you for these documents, tell the officer where they are and reach for them slowly, keeping one hand on the steering wheel. Answer the officer's questions fully and clearly.

If the charge or citation is not clear, ask the officer for an explanation in a respectful manner. Also ask the officer for identification if the officer does not have his/her uniform on or if his/her patrol vehicle does not have official law enforcement markings. Answer the officer's questions and ask your own questions in a calm and courteous manner. If you disagree with the citation or the officer's actions, do not discuss your point of view at that time - wait to have the chance to do it before a judge in court. The citation will show the date and location of your court date.



Do not be surprised if another patrol car appears. This is only to assure the officer's safety.

Let the officer know if you are carrying a weapon in your auto and if you have a legal permit to carry it. Do not resist a pat down. This is done if the officer has a suspicion that you may be carrying anything that would jeopardize officer safety.

Remember the officer's name or badge number if you believe that the officer acted irresponsibly, document the officer's behavior in a written statement and submit it to the officer's agency within a few days after the incident. Then, call the agency and follow their established complaint procedure. If you have any questions about the laws of the state you are in, consult an attorney or law enforcement agency representative who is familiar with the laws of that state.

In most states, you will be asked for your signature if the officer gives you a citation. Your signature is not an admission of guilt. It only means that you received the citation. Any refusal to sign the citation can result in an arrest or being taken to the station to post collateral and pay for the offense.

Practice the golden rule: Treat the officer like you would want to be treated. Treat the officer with respect and teach your children how to treat law enforcement officers with respect.

The Hispanic American Police Command Officers Association (HAPCOA) is a national membership organization with diverse law enforcement expertise at the Federal, state and local government levels. Through its members, HAPCOA has a presence in all phases of law enforcement including areas of traffic safety. The membership is composed of both Hispanic and non-Hispanic professionals who are active or retired from the service. HAPCOA has been working with the Traffic Law Enforcement Division of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration under a co-operative agreement to increase the use of traffic safety information among the Hispanic community.

Hotline 1.888.327.4236

www.nhtsa.dot.gov



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