



What to do when stopped by a Police Officer

Why do police officers stop people?

There are many different reasons why you might be stopped by the police. Whatever the reason, the officer needs your cooperation:

- The police may want to warn you about a potentially dangerous situation.
- You may have committed a traffic violation.
- Your vehicle may match the description of one used in a criminal act.
- The officer might think you are in trouble and need help.
- You may have witnessed a crime.

If you are stopped by the police while driving, you may feel a bit nervous or curious. These are natural feelings, but remember, traffic stops can also be stressful and dangerous for the police officer. Each year, a number of law enforcement officers are killed or seriously injured while making a “routine” traffic stop.

It is policy of the Chincoteague Police Department to unequivocally state that racial and ethnic profiling in law enforcement is absolutely unacceptable. The Chincoteague Police Department is charged with protecting the rights of all, regardless of race, color, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, physical handicap, religion, or other belief system(s).

With this in mind, there are things that you can do as a law-abiding citizen to help lessen the uneasiness of the experience.

What to do when an officer stops you

- When you see the blue overhead lights and/or hear the siren, remain calm, slow down and pull over in a safe location off the roadway.

- Do not exit your vehicle unless asked to do so. This is for safety reasons.
- Keep your hands on the steering wheel so the officer can see them.
- Inform the officer of any weapons in your vehicle and their location. Do not reach or point to the location.
- Avoid any sudden movements, especially toward the floorboard, rear seat or passenger side of the vehicle.
- Comply with the officer's request to see your driver license, proof of insurance and vehicle registration. Virginia law requires you to carry these with you.
- If your documents are out of reach, tell the officer where they are before you reach for them.
- If there are passengers in your vehicle, encourage them to remain quiet and cooperate with instructions. You, as the operator, are solely responsible for your vehicle and its occupants.
- Avoid becoming argumentative. Arguing will not change the officer's mind. If you contest the violation, you will have an opportunity to address the matter in court.
- Answer all questions truthfully.
- The officer may issue you a ticket. If you feel the reason is vague or unclear, politely ask the officer for details.
- If asked to sign a citation, do so. It is not an admission of guilt. Refusal could result in an arrest.

Understand that each situation is unique and the police officer must alter his or her response to fit the circumstance. Generally, however, a police officer:

- Will provide his/her name upon request
- Will inform a person of the reason for being stopped
- Will only arrest a person for a crime committed in the officer's presence, or when the officer has probable cause to believe the person has already committed the crime.