

From the Office of the Sheriff:

A while back I was asked to explain how a law enforcement officer can send a motorist a citation w/o having personal contact or personal observation of the offense. This is the exception not the rule. The Dodge County Sheriff's Dept.'s priority is direct contact with motorists and personal issuance of the citation vs. the U.S. Postal Service. This is not always possible or practical.

A majority of citations mailed are a result of a motorist taking the time to report a violation and meeting with a deputy to provide a written statement of the observed violation. Often these include passing on a no passing zone, failure to stop at a stop sign, expired registration, and reckless driving. Those who receive these citations may get upset about being cited based upon the observations of a "mere citizen" but they are more than that. These citizens take the time to report the offense and then met with a deputy to provide a written statement. They are also asked if they are willing to come to court if needed and must affirm they will. I doubt there are many people who would do this for kicks. These citizens feel strongly about traffic safety, this is their motivation.

Within a couple of weeks we will also start receiving written reports from school bus drivers. Should they observe a violation such as passing a stopped bus, they capture the necessary information and forward to the Sheriff's Department for our investigation. We take these very, very, seriously. The defense that "you" were not driving your car does not make you immune to the citation. These violations carry a very significant monetary penalty.

Most people may think that citations for traffic violations should be observed by a deputy. This is not possible and the example I would use is traffic crashes. Each crash has causation - the reason the crash occurred. It would be inappropriate for the deputy to chase you to the ambulance and interrupt medical treatment to issue a citation. We wait until the investigation to be completed and then forward the citation to you in the mail. It may take just a day or so, others can take weeks.

Drunk driving is another mailed citation. Even though you receive the first citation (Operation while Impaired) personally, the second citation for Operation w/ a Prohibited Alcohol citation is mailed after receipt of your blood results. Drivers must also know that in the event of serious injuries, you need not be conscious to be read your notice prior to blood being taken from you. Often, the deputy reads the notice to the driver as he is in the emergency room being treated - a necessary step in the OWI arrest procedures. Unconsciousness does not imply lack of consent to collect your blood.

For those who may face criminal charges in a crash and your injuries require that you be flown to UW-Madison, you are not off the hook. We quickly make contact with the Dane County Sheriff's Dept. or the City of Madison and they make the arrest for us and collect the blood. We always do have the last resort of a subpoena to get blood results that are taken by the hospital staff as part of your treatment.

While reading this you may think that deputy's will go to any length to issue a simple traffic citation. To the contrary, I believe a deputy must go to these lengths to ensure traffic laws are strictly enforced, that the rights of citizens to assist us is respected, and those guilty of serious traffic crimes are brought to court on behalf of their victims. Thanks for all the great county fair conversations, thanks for listening, tnehls@co.dodge.wi.us