

From the Office of the Sheriff:

Last winter we, as a department started to track the amount of taxpayer resources (time & equipment) being devoted to helping people who run in the ditch during snowy and icy conditions. What we found is that teenagers who couldn't travel to school in icy roads found they could drive to a movie when school was called off. We found that those that may have had their work place closed would still find weather conditions favorable enough to drive to the mall.

During a few storms last year your deputies were busy helping people out of ditches and were unable to respond to other calls or complete other tasks and responsibilities. To me, as a manager that is a problem. There are cases where a deputy is tied up over an hour providing traffic control for the wrecker to extract the motorist from the ditch. Rather than heed law enforcement advice and find lodging they continue their trip only to run into the ditch yet again.

During inclement weather, my philosophy is to dedicate our resources to emergency calls, calls that are a matter of life and death. Another responsibility is to patrol our roadways to assist those who are in the ditch that are classified as a critical employee. Examples include the doctors and nurses who must get to work and the parents who must get home from work to watch their children as day cares/schools close. I want resources available to respond to a serious crash and we can't do that if we are directing traffic because someone who should not be out on the roads is in the ditch.

Another fact is that when storms paralyze the county, routine calls for service can increase, to include domestic situations. Babysitting runoffs delays that response. Driving motorist to hotels and restaurants delay that response. Awaiting wreckers delays that response. Completing the accident report is one-hour minimum. I compare these calls to that of putting first responders at risk rescuing a fisherman that fell thru thin ice after walking past the thin ice sign.

To discourage those from unnecessary road trips during poor driving conditions I have asked the deputies to issue citations to those who are driving too fast for conditions and end up in the ditch. Part of the investigation is the reason you are out on the road when you are asked to limit your driving due to conditions. The deputy has ample discretion to determine speed and forms a basis for the citation. Should you have run into the ditch avoided another vehicle you are not at fault.

Last week, with over 66 run-offs in one day, less than a third was cited. That same day, over 30,000 vehicles traversed our county and only 66 ran off the roadway. Those numbers are very enlightening when folks feel the road conditions are the causation and not the driver. If 29,934 motorists can drive across the county without incident, the remaining should as well, if driving within their ability and road conditions. Less than 2/10<sup>ths</sup> of one percent lost control.

The state statutes state "the operator of every vehicle shall drive an appropriate reduced speed with regard to other traffic or by reason of weather of highway conditions." Many of you do not agree with this type of enforcement. However, should that same vehicle lose control and strike your family rather than slid innocently into the ditch would you feel the same way? Of the 66 last week, 60 innocently ran into the ditch. Thank God. My job is to ensure that those who must drive during inclement weather can do so and no worry about others losing control, crossing the centerline and killing you. Over 29k did exactly that last week, congratulations to you.

Is it fair to those that heed the warning not to drive to expend resources to those that do, but do not necessarily need to? I assure you, each and every patrolman is very reasonable in their discretion. One last story. The weather was bad, road conditions poor, so rather than risk driving themselves the rural family ordered pizza – delivered! Guess what? Runoff. Thanks for listening  
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