An officer's primary responsibility in making traffic stops is to encourage voluntary compliance with traffic laws and improve driver judgment and future behavior. The goal of every traffic stop should be driver education and safer roadways.
LESSON GOAL: At the end of this lesson, you will be able to identify common criminal and noncriminal traffic violations and recognize a valid driver’s license and license tag or plate.

Traffic stops are among the most frequent activities that you will perform. Even though officers conduct traffic stops regularly, there is no such thing as a “routine” one. Many officers are killed each year and thousands more are injured during traffic-related encounters. There is a potential risk of harm each time you make a stop. Every traffic stop requires that you be vigilant and apply officer safety skills and situational awareness throughout the vehicle stop.

Florida Statute s. 316.003, defines a vehicle as “every device, in, upon, or by which any person or property is or may be transported or drawn upon a highway, except devices used exclusively upon stationary rails or tracks.” A traffic stop is the lawful detention of an individual in a vehicle temporarily for an investigative purpose. Through effective traffic enforcement, you can prevent crimes and identify acts or events that are unlawful. Examples include:

- car theft and carjacking
- people with outstanding warrants and escaped prisoners
- drivers with suspended licenses
- abused, kidnapped, and runaway children
- illegal weapons
- drug use or trafficking
- minors in possession of alcohol
- impaired drivers under the influence of alcohol or chemical or controlled substances
- criminals fleeing crime scenes
- uninsured motorists

Traffic Laws

Florida’s Uniform Disposition of Traffic Infractions Act (s. 318.14, F.S.) decriminalizes most traffic violations. You should be familiar with the traffic laws found in chapters 316 (Uniform Traffic Control Law), 320 (Motor Vehicle Licenses and Registration), and 322 (Driver Licenses) of the Florida Statutes.
Most chapter 316 violations are considered infractions, punished by fines, court costs, driving school, or community service hours, but not by incarceration. Because a driver with a traffic infraction may not be jailed, they have no right to a trial by jury or court-appointed lawyer. The driver may elect a hearing before a judge or hearing officer.

An infraction can be either a moving or non-moving violation, depending on how the statute defines the infraction. Because a moving violation could result in a crash or injury, drivers pay a higher fine and may have points assessed against their driver’s licenses. A non-moving violation does not usually cause a crash or injury, so fines for those offenses cost less. Most non-moving violations do not assess points against the driver’s license if the driver complies (fixes faulty equipment, for instance) within a specified period of time. See Figure 10-1 on the next page.

**The Florida Driver’s License**

All people driving in Florida must have a valid driver’s license from Florida, another state, or an entity approved by the state of Florida or the U.S. government (s. 322.15, F.S.). Drivers must show their driving credentials upon demand by a law enforcement officer or authorized representative of the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (DHSMV). DHSMV is the agency responsible for issuing driver’s licenses, motor vehicle titles, license plates, and vessel registrations. It also oversees the Florida Highway Patrol. An identification card issued by the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles is not a driver’s license. It is a form of identification provided by DHSMV as a service to non-drivers who require photo identification. Because it resembles a driver’s license, be careful not to confuse it for one.

If a driver cannot produce a valid driver’s license on demand, request another form of photographic identification, military identification, or reliable personal confirmation, and imprint the driver’s fingerprint on the citation issued for the violation. Never allow a person to operate a motor vehicle if they do not have a valid driver’s license. If a driver is licensed, but does not have the license in their possession, determine whether to issue a citation for failure to carry and exhibit the license upon demand. Follow your agency’s policies.

Florida law does not allow anyone to drive with a suspended, revoked, cancelled, or disqualified license. The charge for doing this may be a moving violation, misdemeanor, or felony depending on the circumstances (s. 322.34, F.S.). A driver’s license also cannot be faded, altered, mutilated, or defaced. If you confiscate the driver’s license due to suspension, mutilation, revocation, or altered data, dispose of it according to your agency’s policies and procedures.

Keep in mind that foreign visitors are not required to obtain an international driving permit. They are required to carry a valid driver’s license from their country or state of residence. A genuine international driver’s license looks similar to a passport, in contrast to a state-issued driver’s license.

**Pre-2017 License Format**

There are three types of the pre-2017 *Florida driver’s license*, which is the license issued to Florida residents who passed the DHSMV tests granting them the privilege to drive in Florida. The Florida driver’s license includes several different classes. Color headers identify the card types and license classes:

- **yellow:** Class E Learner’s license
- **green:** Class E license
### Examples of Common Traffic Violations

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• **blue:** Commercial Driver License (CDL)—Classes A, B, and C
• **red:** Identification Card (not a driver’s license)

Licenses for drivers over the age of 21 are formatted horizontally, while licenses for drivers under the age of 21 are vertical. Closely inspect all licenses to obtain required information, including the expiration date. Remember that carrying a personal Florida identification card does not authorize a person to drive a vehicle.

**New License Format**

Beginning in 2017, some Florida residents may have the new, more secure driver’s license. There are three headshots on the front; one is transparent. In addition, the license has a light blue Florida seal. On the back, there is a headshot, light blue “FL” letters, and a picture of the state of Florida set against a wave background. Designated color headers identify the license class types:

• **orange:** Learner’s License—Class E
• **green:** Driver’s License—Class E
• **blue:** Commercial Driver License (CDL)—Classes A, B, and C
• **red:** Identification Card (not a driver’s license)
Endorsements, Restrictions, and Designations

A license *endorsement* is a special authorization printed on a Florida driver’s license permitting a driver to operate certain types of vehicles or transport certain types of property or number of passengers. Some examples of endorsements include authorization to drive motorcycles, school buses, commercial vehicles, or combination vehicles with double or triple trailers.

A *restriction*, printed on a Florida driver’s license, may limit a driver from operating certain types of motor vehicles or require that they meet certain conditions when driving any motor vehicle. For example, someone who needs corrective lenses may be restricted from driving without them. A person who is hard of hearing may be required to wear hearing aids when driving. Other examples of restrictions may pertain to equipment required on the vehicle, such as hand controls for a driver who does not have full use of their legs.

Pre-2017 Endorsements, Restrictions, and Designations

Required endorsements and restrictions appear on the front of the license. Explanations of the endorsements and restrictions are on the back. For drivers authorized to operate a motorcycle, the following endorsement appears on the front of the driver’s license under the expiration date: Motorcycle Also or Motorcycle Only.

A Florida driver’s license may also include *informational alerts*, which will inform you of a person’s health condition or public safety status. For example, a diabetic person’s license may display “insulin dependent” in red print. You may also see a sexual predator alert (s.775.21, F.S.) or a sexual offender alert (s.943.0435, F. S.) in the right hand corner in black.

There are two designations that appear on the bottom right of a Florida driver’s license or ID card. These voluntary designations may be added for a small fee and with proof of service or necessity:

- **D**—Upon request by a person who has a developmental disability, or by the parent or guardian of a child or ward who has a developmental disability, DHSMV will issue an identification card with a capital “D.”
- **V**—Any honorably discharged U.S. veteran may have a veteran designation placed on their driver’s license or ID card.

Endorsements, Restrictions, and Designations Beginning in 2017

Beginning in 2017 motorcycle-also and motorcycle-only endorsements are designated by an “A” or “O” in the endorsement field located on the front of the card, and by “A-MTRCL Also” or “O-MTRCL Only” on the back of the card. Motorcycle endorsements are no longer spelled out on the front of the license.

The new license and ID card format identifies sexual predators and sexual offenders with a blue identifier designation on the bottom right of the front of the card. Sexual predators will have “Sexual Predator” on the card, while sexual offenders have “943.0435 F.S.” listed in this area.

The new format of license and ID card also has different locations for designations. These will appear on the front of the license in the bottom right corner:

- **Deaf or Hard of Hearing**—ear with arrows
- **Developmentally Disabled**—capital D
• **Insulin Dependent**—INSULIN DEP

• **Veteran**

• **Organ Donor**—heart

These lifetime license designations appear on the back of the license underneath the headshot and are represented by different symbols:

• **FWC Lifetime Sportsman**—crossed firearms

• **FWC Lifetime Boater**—anchor

• **FWC Lifetime Freshwater**—bass

• **FWC Lifetime Hunting**—deer

• **FWC Lifetime Saltwater**—sailfish

**Classes of Florida Driver’s Licenses**

Licenses issued before the 2017 changes display the license class type on both the front and back.

• **CLASS A**: required for drivers of trucks or truck combinations with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 26,001 lbs. or more, provided the towed vehicle is more than 10,000 lbs.

• **CLASS B**: required for drivers of straight trucks (all axles attached to a single frame) with a GVWR of 26,001 lbs. or more.

• **CLASS C**: required for drivers of vehicles transporting hazardous materials in sufficient amounts to require placards or vehicles designed to transport more than 15 people (including the driver), and with a GVWR of less than 26,001 lbs.

• **CLASS E**: required for drivers of any non-commercial motor vehicle with a GVWR less than 26,001 pounds. This includes passenger cars, 15-passenger (including the driver) vans, trucks or recreational vehicles, and two- or three-wheel motor vehicles 50 cc or less, such as mopeds or small scooters. Farmers and drivers of authorized emergency vehicles who are exempt from obtaining a commercial driver’s license must obtain a Class E license.

• **CLASS E-Learner**: A driver with a Class E-Learner’s license is limited to driving motor vehicles weighing less than 8,000 pounds. In addition, they must be accompanied by a person 21 years of age or older who holds a valid driver’s license, and who occupies the closest seat right of the driver. The learner may initially drive only between the hours of 6 a.m. and 7 p.m. Three months after receiving the learner’s license, the driver may drive from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. A driver with a learner’s license may not operate a motorcycle without a motorcycle endorsement.

Beginning in 2017 the class type is located at the top right of the license, either near or below the Department of Homeland Security Real ID Compliant gold star emblem.

**Florida Vehicle License Plates and Tags**

Florida’s DHSMV issues standard and specialized vehicle tags. While the majority of specialized tags are “vanity” plates displaying the owner’s nickname or commemorating a college, sports team, or cause, some have specific uses and restrictions. For example, some tags are limited to commercial or government vehicles.
Others are assigned based on the owner’s status, such as a state legislator. There are also specialized tags that must have additional prefix characters or descriptions not preprinted on the tag. Some examples include various Florida universities, breast cancer awareness, antique vehicles, and Purple Heart tags.
LESSON GOAL: At the end of this lesson, you will be able to recognize the characteristics of a professional traffic stop free of discriminatory or bias-based policing.

Discriminatory or Bias-Based Policing

Discriminatory or bias-based policing is the unequal treatment of any person including stopping, questioning, searching, detaining, or arresting a person solely or primarily because of the person's race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status. Some observers consider bias-based policing to include any law enforcement action, not just traffic stops, that targets an individual based on a variety of group characteristics. Other group characteristics include occupational status or ability to speak English. This behavior is illegal and can bring criminal or civil penalties against you. In our community, this type of illegal behavior will not be tolerated.

Equal Protection

According to Title 18, Section 242 of the United States Code, anyone who

under color of any law, statute, ordinance, regulation, or custom, willfully subjects any person...to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured or protected by the Constitution or laws...or to different punishments, pains, or penalties, on account of such person being an alien, or by reason of color, or race...shall be fined under this title or imprisoned for no more than one year, or both, and if bodily injury results...shall be fined under this title or imprisoned for no more than 10 years or both...and if death results...shall be fined under this title, or imprisoned for any term of years or for life or both, or may be sentenced to death.

The Fourteenth Amendment guarantees every person within the U.S. equal protection under the law. In Mapp v. Ohio, 367 U.S. 643 (1961), the Supreme Court declared that no state can limit this constitutional right; every person is entitled to be treated the same under similar circumstances.

The fact that a person is of a particular racial or ethnic group is not a basis for suspicion of wrongdoing. Drivers may be questioned based only on their conduct. It is illegal to use race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or sexual orientation as the sole basis for stopping a person. However, you may properly focus attention on a person of a particular race or background if you have specific suspect information. For example, if a BOLO is issued for an elderly Asian female suspect wearing a red shirt, you are justified in stopping elderly Asian females wearing red shirts because they fit that specific description.

OBJECTIVES

LE808.1. Explain bias-based or discriminatory policing as it relates to a law enforcement officer's treatment of people while performing the job.

LE808.2. Explain the legal equal protections guaranteed to every person within the United States by Title 18 of the United States Code and the Fourteenth Amendment.

LE808.3. Summarize the perception of unfair treatment by law enforcement during interactions with minorities.

LE808.4. Describe how an officer's consistent professional interactions with all people may minimize tension and encourage cooperation during a traffic stop.

LE808.5. Describe how an officer can effectively bridge communication and language barriers when interacting with the public.
Real and Perceived Issues Minorities Encounter

A minority is a smaller segment of a population, differing from the majority by one or more characteristics. Because of past unequal treatment of minorities, most law enforcement agencies across the country now require officers to report traffic data, including race and gender data, on their traffic stops. This data assists agencies in investigating possible allegations of bias-based policing. Various laws and court rulings require this information to detect and eliminate unfair policing. It is your responsibility to treat everyone within the community equally.

Whether the perception is accurate, minorities may believe that they are unfairly treated by law enforcement officers, particularly with regard to traffic stops. The reality of modern society is that crimes happen in every community. There are also misconceptions, a result of a community’s perception of how they are served. For example, some minorities believe they are stopped more than others. This may depend on the area where you are making traffic stops. For instance, if you work in an area that is mostly populated with minorities, you will probably stop more minorities.

Minimizing Tension and Maximizing Cooperation

When stopped, a driver may react with embarrassment, anger, fear, or excuses. The situation can be tense. If you conduct a legitimate and professional traffic stop, you can minimize negative and potentially unsafe results. Following agency policies and using these steps can help you to de-escalate the tension in a traffic stop.

• Greet the driver (and passengers) politely, introduce yourself and ask, “Do you know why I stopped you?” This can reduce the tension, instead of starting the conversation off by telling the driver what they did wrong.

• Immediately explain why you made the stop; courts have ruled that people are entitled to know why they were stopped before any further discussion or requests are made. Describe the violation in terms of what you saw the vehicle, not the driver, do.

• Maintain a pleasant expression, a calm tone of voice, and a non-confrontational interview stance.

• Establish a commanding presence by using words that convey professionalism and mutual respect.

• Allow the driver to talk or vent; you should remain polite and focused, conveying to the driver that you are listening to them.

• Do not argue with the driver; simply explain the observations and the violation, if any. Whether or not you issue a warning or citation, listening respectfully will help many people calm down and accept the situation.

• Emphasize the importance of the enforcement action by explaining the seriousness of the violation, such as the risk of a crash or other circumstance. Do not lecture the person on what they did wrong.

• Keep the detention time as short as possible.

• End the interaction with a “Thank you for your cooperation,” or “Drive safely,” in a courteous, non-sarcastic manner.

• Provide the person with your rank, name, and badge number upon request.

• Eliminate racially-charged stereotypes, racial jokes, and epithets from your speech. This is insensitive behavior and has no place in any law enforcement action.
When dealing with a difficult or disrespectful driver, you may be tempted to respond unprofessionally. Don’t let personal feelings or emotion interfere with your job performance. Law enforcement work is stressful, but you have sworn to uphold the Constitution and the law. No circumstances will justify acting in an unethical or discriminatory manner.

**Bridging Communication and Language Barriers**

Recall from Chapter 3 that language barriers can hinder communication. Determine the driver’s ability to understand you when making a traffic stop. For example, many Florida drivers may not understand English. They may be concerned about being stopped, what you are doing, and what they are supposed to do during the traffic stop. Consider requesting an interpreter if the language barrier makes it difficult for the driver to understand. If an interpreter is not available, try to communicate as best as you can by using gestures. If available, use Google translate, speak to other occupants, or talk to the driver’s family members who can relay information. Hearing-impaired drivers also present a challenge, though some can read lips. Writing notes back and forth may be a good method in such a situation.

To encourage communication, you must constantly demonstrate professionalism and remember to do the following:

- be patient
- speak clearly
- show respect
- take adequate time when speaking
- avoid talking down to anyone or being demeaning
- listen carefully and explain fully what is expected and what you are doing, and
- refer motorists to an appropriate source within your department if you are unable to answer all their questions.

As you gain experience making traffic stops, your communication skills will improve. Sometimes a standardized approach or script minimizes officer and driver conflict. This approach can become a habit, ultimately assisting you if you need to testify in court about interactions with a driver.

When dealing with people during traffic stops, your professional behavior will be the difference between a positive contact with the community and creating division. Courteous, professional officers may issue hundreds of citations without generating a citizen complaint, often receiving a verbal “thank you” from the cited motorists. Drivers do not thank the officer for the citation; they thank an officer for treating them with respect, courtesy, and dignity.
LESSON GOAL: At the end of this lesson, you will be able to recognize when and how to initiate a safe and professional unknown risk traffic stop.

Deciding to Make a Traffic Stop

If you are working in stationary mode (where the patrol vehicle is stopped or parked), choose a safe parking place for the patrol vehicle. This should be a place where you can monitor vehicle movement and watch for traffic violations. For example, when watching drivers at a traffic light intersection, park your patrol vehicle where it does not obstruct traffic flow but can enter the roadway quickly and safely to make a necessary stop. Safe places include areas with a wide shoulder off the roadway, available parking areas, and areas with an unobstructed view of oncoming traffic when entering the road.

A traffic stop begins the moment you observe a reason that merits the stop. All traffic stops are unknown risk traffic stops, because the potential risk of the situation is not known. You may stop a vehicle for a traffic infraction or if you have reasonable suspicion that a crime was, is being, or is about to be committed. You might conduct a stop if you observe a violation for which a citation may be issued. Other justifications for a traffic stop are to assist a motorist who is lost or whose vehicle has mechanical trouble, to investigate suspicious behavior, or to investigate a vehicle or occupant matching a BOLO description.

Once you see an articulable reason for a stop, decide whether it is necessary, prudent, and safe to stop the vehicle. If you are en route to an emergency call, an in-progress crime, or are transporting a prisoner, stopping a driver for a traffic violation is generally not practical. However, a reckless driver who is immediately endangering the lives of other motorists and pedestrians may justify a stop, even if stopping means abandoning the earlier call. Your agency’s policies will dictate the priority in these situations.

If immediately stopping the driver may endanger you or other motorists, you should not make the stop. Unsafe conditions for a stop include heavy traffic, construction, or roadway conditions that do not allow room to pull over; for example, it is not safe to make a stop on a bridge.

Planning the Stop

Plan the stop in an area that gives the driver a place to stop safely, preferably in a well-lit location with a low traffic volume. Be ready to adjust and react quickly to any developments once the driver stops the vehicle. Any suspicious activity by the driver or passengers can increase the level of risk; consider requesting backup as needed.
Also, you will have to plan the stop with regard to traffic flow. Traffic flow is the general speed and direction of vehicle or pedestrian movement. Weather conditions, school zones, construction zones, and neighborhood activities all affect traffic flow, slowing drivers and causing congestion. In addition to traffic flow, certain roadway and traffic conditions increase the potential for particular traffic violations. These include merge areas, intersections, and acceleration lanes. If you have an assigned patrol zone, be familiar with normal traffic flow, speed limits and where they change, changes to traffic flow at different times of day, and traffic conditions.

**Initiating the Stop**

Be familiar with area roads in order to select a safe location to initiate the stop.

**Step 1:** Follow the driver through traffic until you determine at what point to safely make the traffic stop.

Use defensive driving techniques to catch up with the vehicle and follow at a safe distance. Signal all lane changes. A well-executed traffic stop will have a minimal effect on traffic flow. Other drivers may slow down to see what is happening, which can cause a traffic jam or hazard. You may have to follow a vehicle for some time before initiating the stop. If needed, request another patrol vehicle for help. You may need to follow the driver’s vehicle for an extended period before backup arrives.

Except in emergencies when a stop is necessary, choose a location where the driver can maneuver out of the flow of traffic. This should be a place where both you and the driver can avoid the danger of passing vehicles. Passing traffic is not the only risk, as stopping a person in a populated area may create a volatile and dangerous scene. Be aware of your situation and safety at all times.

To ensure that you are stopping the correct vehicle, constantly observe the vehicle from the time of the violation until the stop is completed. Note the vehicle’s description, including its type, make, model, year, color, tag number, and state where the tag was issued. Note the driver’s description (glasses, hat, beard) and any information about passengers, as well as any vehicle descriptors, such as condition, bumper stickers or decals, dents, or a truck toolbox.

**Step 2:** Notify dispatch of the traffic stop.

Your safety depends on how much information you can gather before making a stop. Provide as much complete and accurate information as possible to allow dispatch to perform a database check on the tag before you talk to the driver. If you see the occupants acting suspiciously, immediately request backup. If the final stop location changes, update dispatch immediately.

Contact dispatch and relay the following general information according to agency policies:

- your identification number
- your location, such as the street, plus a cross street or a house number; this is crucial on interstates and divided highways. If the situation escalates and you are injured or cannot use the radio, dispatch can pinpoint your location.
- your general direction of travel: north, south, east, or west
- vehicle tag number and state of issue
• a description of the driver’s vehicle including color, make, approximate year
• the number of occupants and descriptions if possible
• the need for backup or other assistance as required

Step 3: Select a safe location to stop.

Be conscious of the following conditions when you select the location to make the stop:
• width of road and shoulder
• level of visibility
• lighting
• population (the number of people present at the time of the stop)
• traffic congestion
• presence of hills and curves
• time of day
• weather conditions

Check the width of the road and the shoulder to ensure that both you and the driver are far enough off the road so that other vehicles can pass. This prevents crashes, especially in a congested area where other drivers may not be able to change lanes to give you extra room. Try to pull off onto a level spot or a slight downgrade. Stopping on an upgrade may cause a large vehicle to roll into the patrol vehicle. You should not make a stop on a curve, a ramp, or the crest of a hill, close to an exit ramp, or where road conditions could cause other vehicles to hit the patrol vehicle. Additionally, take special caution when conducting stops in areas where children are present, such as school zones or parking lots.

Step 4: Activate emergency equipment to communicate the stop to the driver.

Officer-driver interaction begins when you signal the driver to stop. Once that signal is given, you have limited control over where the driver will stop.

Begin communicating the stop by pulling your patrol vehicle directly behind the driver’s vehicle. You are required to turn on your emergency notification equipment once you are in a safe location to make the stop (s. 316.216, F.S.). Emergency notification equipment includes emergency lights, siren, headlights, PA system, and horn. It may not be necessary to use all emergency notification equipment to communicate the stop.

Use flashing emergency lights cautiously when conducting traffic stops. Each driver reacts differently. Some might panic and stop in the left lane, skid to a stop, or swerve. Others ignore the lights. If this happens, tap the siren for one or two seconds. Emergency lighting systems differ among agencies. The light bar is one system, along with strobe, flashers, and other lights. If the stop occurs at night, use spotlights for additional lighting.

The patrol vehicle’s high beams, spotlight, and takedown lights (white lights facing forward on the light bar) will conceal you from the driver’s view and are important for officer safety and survival. Turn on the patrol vehicle’s high beams, unless they interfere with oncoming traffic or restrict your vision by reflecting off the driver’s rear bumper or other object. If your patrol vehicle is equipped with them, activate the takedown
lights to illuminate the interior of the driver’s vehicle. This also prevents the driver from seeing into the patrol vehicle.

The driver may indicate that they know you are asking them to stop. They may look into the rearview mirror and make eye contact with you, signal a lane change to pull over, or suddenly reduce speed. Once the driver acknowledges that you have directed them to stop:

1. Follow the vehicle as the driver changes lanes.
2. Follow the driver’s vehicle at a safe distance.
3. If uncomfortable with the initial stopping place, direct the driver to a safer location.

Stay far enough behind the driver so that you can react to any situation. Use safety precautions, such as avoiding traffic lanes, watching for pedestrians, and protecting the driver. If you need to move to a safer location, give clear but firm verbal directions using the PA system. You might say, “Driver, proceed into the parking lot ahead to the right” or “Driver, pull your vehicle farther to the right.” Leave the overhead emergency lights on to warn oncoming traffic during the stop.
UNIT 3 | UNKNOWN RISK TRAFFIC STOPS

LESSON 2 | Conducting the Stop

LESSON GOAL: At the end of this lesson, you will know how to safely and professionally conduct an unknown risk traffic stop.

OBJECTIVES
LE026.11. Apply officer safety skills correctly when undertaking an unknown risk traffic stop.
LE026.12. Park the patrol vehicle properly after the driver’s vehicle has stopped during an unknown risk traffic stop.
LE026.13. Position the backup patrol vehicle properly, if requested, after the driver’s vehicle has stopped.
LE026.15. Identify the number of additional passengers in the vehicle during an unknown risk traffic stop.
LE026.16. Approach the driver’s vehicle safely during an unknown risk traffic stop.
LE026.17. Explain how to safely conduct a “no approach” method of calling the driver back to the officer’s patrol vehicle during a traffic stop.
LE026.18. Request identifying information politely from the vehicle driver after explaining the reason for the stop and waiting for an explanation.
LE026.19. Arrange appropriate assistance for the driver if needed during a traffic stop.

Conducting the Stop

Step 5: Park the patrol vehicle.

After stopping the driver in a safe location, park the patrol vehicle a safe distance behind the driver’s vehicle. Because of roadway conditions, traffic, and other environmental factors, each traffic stop is unique. As a general rule, you should position the patrol vehicle one and a half to two car lengths behind the driver’s vehicle.

If the driver stops on the right side of the road, assume the offset-angle position where you align the center of the patrol vehicle’s hood with the taillight of the driver’s vehicle and then point your vehicle’s nose outward into the flow of traffic. If the situation escalates, the offset position can provide cover from any hostile action from the driver’s vehicle.

With a more dramatic turn of the front of the patrol vehicle in either direction, you may not need to offset the vehicle. The angle of the patrol vehicle may prevent traffic from getting too close and provide safety. If needed, you can use the PA system to verbally direct the driver to move their vehicle further to the right to improve your safety and reduce the obstruction of traffic.

Continued officer safety also involves the following practices:

- ensuring you are a safe distance from the roadway
- maintaining a safe reactionary distance between the driver’s vehicle and the patrol vehicle
- offsetting or angling the patrol vehicle in relation to the driver’s vehicle
- adhering to agency policies and procedures

In emergencies or less than optimal conditions, you might make a traffic stop on the roadway. Move your vehicle to the far outside of the driving lane without offsetting its angle position.
After making a stop, be prepared to exit the patrol vehicle quickly. Constantly observe the driver’s vehicle and all occupants. If you sense any danger while assessing the situation, request backup. Use emergency lights at all times.

Positioning of the Backup Patrol Vehicles

Backup officers should park their patrol vehicles at a safe distance behind your patrol vehicle. Depending on the location of the traffic stop and its environmental conditions, the backup patrol vehicles might be offset to the left or the right of your vehicle. This allows the emergency lighting to illuminate the back of the vehicles. Backup officers will limit the use of emergency lighting from their vehicles to avoid blinding or silhouetting responding officers. If possible, they should only use their rear emergency lights. Backup officers should approach the driver’s vehicle along the passenger side of your patrol vehicle to prevent a crossfire situation.

**Step 6: Conduct a visual assessment of the vehicle and occupants.**
Assess the driver’s vehicle for signs of danger before you leave your patrol vehicle. If the occupants attempt to exit the driver’s vehicle, your discretion and your agency policy will determine whether to immediately order them back into the vehicle. If the vehicle appears to be heavily weighed down in the rear, discuss this with the driver when you exit the patrol vehicle. The vehicle could be carrying stolen merchandise, drugs, tools, a person, or a corpse.

**LE026.20.** Identify the most accurate forms of personal identification that could be requested from a driver during a traffic stop.

**LE026.21.** Direct the driver and passengers where to safely wait, if required, during an unknown risk traffic stop.

**LE006.5.** Compare criminal justice database information with the personal information during a traffic stop.

**LE026.22.** Describe additional information about a stopped person or vehicle that may be obtained from dispatch or FCIC/NCIC databases.
Be mindful that most people will be stressed or fearful during a stop. Expect some activity as the driver retrieves their driver’s license, registration, and insurance information from a wallet, glove compartment, or center console. However, if the occupants are nervously watching you, moving towards the floorboard or backseat, excessive motion that seems beyond natural curiosity, or are seated in a rigid, wooden posture, this may indicate that the occupants are frightened or poised for action. Constantly observe behavior for signs of danger.

**Step 7: Exit the patrol vehicle.**

A silent exit from the patrol vehicle gives you time to approach the vehicle and assess the situation before the driver reacts. Exit your vehicle quickly, after checking for oncoming traffic in the rear and side-view mirrors. Quietly secure the vehicle door so it will not blow open and strike a passing vehicle. Adjust your portable radio volume to low. Constantly observe the vehicle and all its occupants.

**Step 8: Apply appropriate approach techniques.**

Keep in mind that the driver could have lethal opioid drugs, such as fentanyl, in their possession. You are allowed to have and to administer emergency opioid antagonists to treat someone who has overdosed on fentanyl. Be sure to follow agency policies and procedures if you are exposed to this drug because it may cause life-threatening ailments.

If a situation seems dangerous, request backup and wait for its arrival before taking any further action. When you exit the patrol vehicle make sure to use available cover. Do not walk between your patrol vehicle and the subject’s vehicle. You could be pinned between vehicles if the driver places their vehicle in reverse, or if another vehicle accidently strikes your vehicle.

At night, you should avoid crossing in front of the headlights and betraying your location. Walk behind your vehicle if you need to approach the passenger side of the driver’s vehicle. Keep your flashlight off while on approach until you make contact with the driver and other passengers.

Look at the license plate for these clues that the plate may not belong to the driver’s vehicle:

- the way the plate is attached may suggest the license plate is from another vehicle
- age of attachment relative to the plate (e.g., Are there shiny, new bolts on a dirty plate?)
- expired registration sticker or sticker that looks like it was removed from another plate
- paint or dark film on the license plate
- the presence of dead insects on the tag, suggesting it was the front plate of another vehicle

Check the trunk lock and trunk lid alignment to determine if someone is possibly in the trunk. If the trunk lid is unlatched, push it down when you approach the vehicle. Be aware that modern technology allows the trunk to be opened from the inside. Touching the rear of the driver’s vehicle also transfers your fingerprints to the vehicle as evidence of contact. Touch the trunk lid for this reason during every traffic stop, even if the lid appears closed. Check for a popped trunk lock or a hole in the trunk where the lock should be, a common sign of a stolen vehicle.
**Approaching the Vehicle on the Driver’s Side**

Approach the driver’s vehicle cautiously, constantly assessing the situation. Do not fix your full attention on any one part of the scene, but rather scan the entire vehicle and its occupants for suspicious movements throughout the stop. Examine the interior of the vehicle while looking through the rear window into the rear seat. Try to determine the number of passengers, the position of the rear seat, and the presence of any potential weapons or contraband.

Stay close to the vehicle, stopping at the back edge of the driver’s door, also known as the B-pillar. At night, hold your flashlight in your support hand. Remain behind the driver’s B-pillar for cover. This gives you a position of advantage while maintaining a safe distance when talking with the driver.

If, when approaching on the driver’s side, you see a passenger in the backseat, stop at the back of the rear window, also known as the C-pillar. Instruct the driver to roll the driver and the driver’s side rear passenger windows down. If no one occupies the backseat, remain behind the driver’s B-pillar to take advantage of the cover. Continually watch the driver and any passengers.

**Approaching the Vehicle on the Passenger’s Side**

Approaching on the passenger’s side will give you extra time to look and listen. The occupants of the vehicle will likely expect you to approach on the driver’s side. Be observant so that you can tell if the driver is concealing something on their right side. This includes keys in the ignition, a weapon, an alcoholic beverage container, and drugs or drug paraphernalia. While you are observing the driver to see if they are concealing anything, look for a popped or damaged ignition. If an ignition is popped or damaged, the plastic housing around the steering column’s base has been popped open, exposing ignition wires that can be pulled forward to start the car. It also means that the lock cylinder was removed from the ignition assembly, so there will be no car keys present.

In addition to observing the driver, pay attention to the number of other occupants that may be in the vehicle. If passengers occupy the backseat, remain standing at the rear of the C-pillar. If the preliminary visual check reveals a potential threat, call for backup and assess the situation.

**“No Approach”—Calling the Driver Back to the Officer’s Patrol Vehicle**

Decide whether to approach the driver’s vehicle or call the driver back to the patrol vehicle (called the no-approach tactic) to acquire information. If you don’t feel safe approaching the vehicle, you may want to call the driver to the patrol vehicle. You may also want to call the driver to the patrol vehicle if the driver’s windows are tinted dark, if there are multiple occupants, or if you can’t see what is going on inside of the vehicle.

If you decide to call the driver back to the patrol vehicle, assume a tactical position behind one of the patrol vehicle doorposts, the passenger side door, or the rear of the patrol vehicle; do not remain in your car. Use a commanding voice or the PA to verbally direct the driver to walk back to the patrol vehicle. If the driver is looking at you directly or through a mirror, you can motion the driver to come back to the patrol vehicle. As the driver approaches, be observant, especially of the driver’s hands, for any signs of aggression or the presence of a weapon.
Step 9: Interact with the driver.

When interacting with the driver, use effective communication as discussed in Chapter 3. The key to effectively communicate with the vehicle driver is to display a courteous but commanding presence; you are less likely to encounter resistance. Make sure your expression, tone of voice, body position, gestures, and words are professional and respectful even while you are being assertive. Begin by identifying yourself as a law enforcement officer, especially if you are not in uniform. Be polite and respectful in your interactions with the vehicle passengers.

It is important to practice observation skills, safe positioning, and safe distancing when interviewing the driver or passengers. If the situation becomes dangerous or unstable, increase the distance between yourself and the stopped vehicle.

Courteously explain the reason for the stop in terms of what you saw the vehicle, not the driver, doing, and request the required documentation. An explanation for the stop might include the observation that the vehicle is in violation of s. 316.221, F.S., inoperable taillamps, for instance. Allow the driver to offer an explanation, such as medical difficulties or vehicle malfunctions. If necessary, contact dispatch to request medical assistance for the driver or arrange for a relative or responsible person to remove the vehicle or have it towed.

Drivers in Florida are required to “present or submit” a driver’s license, vehicle registration, and proof of insurance upon an officer’s request (ss. 322.15, and 320.0605, F.S.). Additionally, a driver can provide proof of insurance in either a uniform paper, or electronic format as approved by DHSMV (ss. 316.646 and 320.02, F.S.). Never accept a wallet from the driver. Instead, ask the driver to remove the license from the wallet. This prevents the driver from later making accusations of theft.

During the stop, observe the interior of the vehicle and activities of the passengers. You may ask where the driver keeps the documents; doing this will help you predict where the driver’s hands will move. If the driver reaches to open the glove compartment or other inside compartment, request that they do so slowly. Pay close attention to both of the driver’s hands. The driver could use the reaching hand as a distraction while going for a weapon or object with the other hand.

The driver is the only occupant in the vehicle required to provide documentation, unless other occupants are suspected of a crime or violation. If such a suspicion demands identification from other passengers, request documents that provide accurate personal information:

- driver’s license or state-issued identification card (with picture)
- school picture identification
- military ID
- permanent residence card (green card)

Verify that the information on the license is current and valid. Compare information on the registration to the VIN, make, type, and year of the vehicle. If the driver does not have identification, ask for the last four digits of their Social Security number.

In addition, confirm that the insurance card is current and applicable to that vehicle. Be mindful of safety concerns and use discretion while applying the most appropriate technique in interactions with other passengers in the vehicle. You may request that the driver and any occupants stay in the driver’s vehicle or in a designated place within your sight—to make attacking you from behind more difficult.
After obtaining the driver’s documentation, return to your patrol vehicle and complete the criminal justice database checks using the driver’s information. Depending on your agency’s policies, you may need to request that dispatch do the database check. In addition to checking the driver’s information, query any concealed weapons permits to check the validity by running the license number on the permit. Be familiar with your agency’s policies regarding traffic stops that involve individuals with a concealed weapons permit. Remember to keep an eye on the vehicle and its occupants while you are running the database checks.

The information from DAVID and FCIC/NCIC databases can be useful during traffic stops. Recall from Chapter 5 that these databases provide information on people with outstanding arrest warrants (entire U.S.), drivers’ licenses, and vehicle registrations. If the driver matches an identity or returns a hit with a criminal history record, and the identifying information has been confirmed with the local agency of entry, you may arrest the driver. You may impound the vehicle when necessary and as your agency’s policies and procedures dictate.

SECTION VOCABULARY

- no-approach tactic
- offset-angle position
- popped or damaged ignition
UNIT 3 | UNKNOWN RISK TRAFFIC STOPS

LESSON 3 | Enforcement Options

LESSON GOAL: At the end of this lesson, you will know how to take appropriate law enforcement action to resolve an unknown risk traffic stop.

Course of Action

Use discretion and good judgment when deciding on an enforcement option for a traffic violation. You may decide to take no action, issue a verbal warning, issue a written warning, issue a citation, or make an arrest. The law, your agency’s policies, and the circumstances of the violation affect your enforcement options, and the manner in which you issue an enforcement document.

This discretion applies only to traffic violations and most misdemeanor offenses. Some agencies do not permit officers to issue written warnings. Others do not allow verbal warnings.

Weigh the seriousness of the offense, the road, the weather, and traffic conditions when deciding a course of action. Document each stop with appropriate, recorded enforcement action, whether it is a citation, a warning, or an arrest. Only write a citation when there is a clear violation which is not satisfactorily excused or justified by the situation. Florida law mandates that all felonies are arrestable offenses. If you have probable cause for a felony arrest, you must make that arrest.

Uniform Traffic Citations (UTC)

The uniform traffic citation (UTC) is for traffic offenses covered under chapters 316, 318, 320, and 322, F.S. Generally, this form will be the only report that you need to complete for traffic offenses, unless it is a crash scene; then a crash report is also required. The UTC also is used for certain non-traffic felonies and misdemeanors that can result in suspension or revocation of the person’s driver’s license. State law requires you to issue a citation to anyone accused of any offense that requires the mandatory revocation of a driver’s license (s. 316.650, F.S.).

Many agencies use the electronic version of this form; other agencies use the paper book format. The forms are the same regardless, and you are required to fill them out the same way. When you complete an electronic ticket, click on UTC and print a copy of the citation to give to the driver or email a copy as requested. The citation is electronically submitted to the clerk’s office. You may have to print a copy of the citation for your agency before electronically submitting it. Follow your agency policies and procedures on distributing electronic citations.
If using the paper format, your agency will assign UTC books with a preprinted number. You must account for each UTC in this book. If a UTC is destroyed or lost before you give it to the driver, document the circumstances of the destruction or loss in the UTC book. DHSMV tracks all UTC numbers to ensure integrity in issuing citations. It is an act of official misconduct to dispose of a traffic citation in a manner other than as required (s. 316.650, F.S.).

In addition to DHSMV’s responsibility to keep accurate records regarding UTCs, each law enforcement agency must keep records of and must account for all citations supplied to them. On the front of the UTC book there are two carbon copies that you must sign, acknowledging receipt of the book. Your agency may have additional procedures for assigning citation books and may use these receipts to assist with internal control and record keeping.

Once you receive the receipt for a book, inspect it to ensure that the citations are in correct numeric sequence and that it contains 25 three-part citations. Inspect the sequential numbers assigned to each book to ensure that the numbers on the book are the same as the numbers of the citations contained in the book and listed on your receipt.

Each UTC book is recorded in the DHSMV inventory files as distributed to a particular agency. The books cannot be transferred between agencies. If you leave employment with an agency, you must turn your UTC book(s) over to your immediate supervisor. DHSMV periodically conducts audits of UTC books (s. 316.650, F.S.).

**Distribution of Traditional Paper Uniform Traffic Citations**

The traditional paper Florida uniform traffic citation form HSMV 75901 contains three copies:

**Part One (white)—Complaint—Retained by Court**

This part is designed to serve as a sufficient complaint for both civil and criminal cases. Judges and clerks use this to document court actions taken on the reverse side of the form. A citation must be submitted to the clerk of the court within five days after it has been issued to a driver (s. 316.650, F.S.).

**Part Two (yellow)—Summons—Driver’s Copy**

This part is reserved for the violator. The reverse side is to be used only to notify people charged with traffic infractions (not requiring a court appearance) on what options they have when answering the offense charged.

**Part Three (pink)—Officer Copy**

Either you or your agency will keep this paper form to maintain accountability and a record of the court’s action, and for you to make notes for testifying in court. You may wish to retain a copy for your field notes in case you have to make a court appearance.

LE091.9. Explain the citation disposition options available to the driver in a professional manner during a traffic stop.

LE091.10. Explain the driver’s responsibility to adhere to traffic laws and local ordinances during a traffic stop.

LE091.11. Explain the driver’s requirement to sign mandatory hearing and criminal citations during a traffic stop.

LE091.12. Identify the violation for refusal to sign the citation during a traffic stop.

LE091.13. Explain how to professionally conclude an unknown risk traffic stop.

LE026.24. Determine whether to make a legal arrest for an unrelated offense during an unknown risk traffic stop.

LE026.25. Determine the disposition of the vehicle and remaining passengers after the driver has been arrested in accordance with agency policy.
Completing a Uniform Traffic Citation

The instructions for completing the uniform traffic citation are in the Uniform Traffic Citations Manual available at http://www.flhsmv.gov/courts/utc/. You should review the description and procedures sections of the manual. Remember to

1. Make sure that the hard divider separates the set (three copies of the citation) from the other sets in the booklet.
2. Use a pen with a hard tip, such as a black ball point pen, and print to ensure that the information is legible on all three copies.
3. Clearly fill in each data field or “X” the appropriate box based on the requested information at the top of each category.
4. Complete all applicable sections and leave blank any that are not applicable.

Sometimes DHSMV returns a UTC to the issuing agency for correction or clarification. Common errors include illegible handwriting, omitted statute number and sub-section, failure to list a statute corresponding to the description of the violation, failure to either check or write in a violation, or incorrect entry of the driver’s date of birth.

Explaining and Issuing the Warning or Citation

The driver must understand the violation and the warning or the citation. Make sure that you understand Florida traffic violations well enough to explain the offense to someone unfamiliar with the law. Give the specifics of the violation slowly and clearly. Ensure that the driver understands when you give the verbal warning or present the written warning or citation. On the citation, point to the section where you checked the violation and wrote specifics of the incident.

Make sure that the driver also understands their options for responding to the citation. These are explained in detail on the back of the driver’s (yellow) copy.

• Moving violation options are to
  – pay a civil penalty
  – request a hearing in traffic court
  – attend and complete a Driver Improvement Course (if eligible) (Some moving violations require a court appearance.)

• Non-moving violation options are to pay a civil penalty or choose a hearing in traffic court.

• Criminal violations require a court appearance on a scheduled date.

If charged with operating a motor vehicle that is in an unsafe condition or is not properly equipped, a driver may choose to provide certified proof of correction of the condition or equipment problem.

If you cite the driver with failure to display a valid driver’s license, registration, proof of insurance, or a vehicle safety violation, the driver may choose to enter a plea of nolo contendere (no contest). The driver must provide proof of compliance to the clerk of court within 30 days and pay a fine and court costs if they are charged with any of the following:
• Safety of vehicle: inspection. (s. 316.610, F.S.)
• Failure to display a valid driver license (s. 322.15, F.S.)
• Failure to possess a valid registration (s. 320.0605, F.S.)
• Failure to maintain proof of insurance (s. 316.646, F.S.)

Encourage the driver to be aware of their responsibility to obey traffic laws and local ordinances. By explaining safety issues and the importance of preventing violations, you will help the driver understand the law. Return the driver’s documents with a copy of the warning or citation and any relevant public information pamphlets that your agency may provide.

**Signatures on the Citation**

Most violations no longer require the driver to sign the violation, but if the driver has committed a violation that requires a hearing (s. 318.19, F.S., or chapters 316, 320, or 322, F.S.), ask the driver to sign the UTC and explain that signing is not an admission of guilt. These violations are serious in nature, and include the following:

- any infraction that results in a crash that causes the death of another (s. 316.027, F.S.)
- any infraction that results in a crash that causes “serious bodily injury” of another (s. 316.1933, F.S.)
- any infraction of passing a school bus on the side where children enter or exit while the bus is displaying a stop signal (s. 316.172, F.S.)
- any infraction of dropping loads from vehicles (s. 316.520, F.S.)
- any infraction of exceeding the speed limit by 30 m.p.h. or more (ss. 316.183, 316.187, or 316.189, F.S.)
- driving with a suspended license (s. 322.34, F.S.)
- leaving the scene of an accident (s. 316.061, F.S.)

If the citation is criminal and you are issuing an electronic citation, print a copy and have the driver sign it before submitting it to records. You can add notes to the electronic ticket so that if the driver contests the citation in court, you can pull up the ticket and see the notes for reference. When you issue the citation, certify by electronic, electronic facsimile, or written signature that you delivered the citation to the person cited. Check the block that certifies the driver received a copy of the violation. This citation is evidence that the person cited was served with the citation.

Refusal to accept and sign a uniform traffic citation requiring a court appearance is a criminal violation that may result in arrest (s. 318.14(3), F.S.). If you are confronted with a driver who refuses to sign the citation, use good communication and de-escalation skills to gain compliance from the driver. Tell the driver that refusal to accept and sign the citation might result in arrest. Stress that signing the UTC is not an admission of guilt or a waiver of rights. If the driver still refuses to sign, place them under arrest and issue another UTC for refusal to sign a citation.

**Professional Behavior**

Throughout the traffic stop, maintain professional and courteous behavior with the driver and passengers. Completing contact with a driver is easier when you clearly explain options for handling the citation. Do not argue about the merits of the citation with the driver or tell the driver to “Have a nice day,” since this could be interpreted as sarcasm.
If the driver expresses a desire to make a complaint against you, politely explain the process for doing so and notify your supervisor according to your agency policy. A driver who is upset should be allowed time to calm down before resuming driving. Showing professional courtesy will help reduce the tension. When the driver is ready to leave, make sure the driver is able to safely reenter traffic. Return to your vehicle and clear the stop with dispatch.

**Arrests during Traffic Stops**

During a traffic stop, you may develop probable cause to justify an arrest of a driver or a passenger for an unrelated offense. Whether you make a physical arrest or take some other action will depend on the nature of the offense, the severity of the circumstances, and your agency’s policies and procedures. Once you make an arrest decision, call for backup. When the backup officer arrives, use a safe method to approach and conduct the arrest. Follow agency policies and procedures for handcuffing the arrestee and placing them in the patrol vehicle.

**Disposition of the Vehicle**

If you arrest a driver during the course of a traffic stop, you then must decide what to do with the vehicle and any passengers. Depending on the offense, you may search the vehicle, impound it, or retain it for evidence. You may arrange for a third party to remove the suspect vehicle or leave it at the scene with the owner’s consent when the driver is arrested. If the vehicle is stolen or if the vehicle must be impounded, contact a wrecker to take the vehicle to the impound lot. Inventory the contents of the vehicle and remove and secure any remaining driver possessions and items per agency policy.
LESSON GOAL: At the end of this lesson, you will be able to identify the safety factors involved in a high risk traffic stop and know how to prepare to make the stop.

Primary Objectives of a High Risk Traffic Stop

A traffic stop is never routine, but the risk of confrontation, injury, or death to you or to the public increases if you know that a vehicle was stolen, was seen in the commission of a felony, or when the driver or an occupant is suspected of a crime in progress or felony. This is known as a high risk traffic stop. Listening, observing, coordinating with other officers, and maintaining constant communication are especially critical during these stops.

The primary objectives of a high risk traffic stop include the following:

- keeping yourself and the public safe
- being able to recognize a suspect vehicle from a BOLO description
- properly relaying what you observed to dispatch and other responders
- stopping the vehicle safely
- arresting the suspect for the crime listed on the BOLO

Identifying a Vehicle or a Suspect

You might receive information about a BOLO during roll call or over your mobile data unit in your vehicle. Use the specific facts from the BOLO to identify a possible matching vehicle or suspect. Look at each part of the BOLO or confirm through dispatch to compare your observations with the BOLO information. If they match, notify dispatch that you have located the vehicle or suspect.

Information to Relay to Dispatch

Give dispatch your location, the suspect vehicle’s location, travel direction, and description:

- make
- model
- model year
- color
- tag number and state of issuance

OBJECTIVES

LE027.1. Apply officer safety skills correctly when undertaking a high risk traffic stop.

LE027.2. Verify that the observed vehicle corresponds with a suspect vehicle description, BOLO, criminal justice database hit, or felony violation prior to making a high risk traffic stop.

LE027.3. List critical, timely information to relate to dispatch while maintaining visual contact with the suspect vehicle when conducting a high risk traffic stop.
• any visible damage to the vehicle
• special markings (neon lights, bumper stickers, writing on windows, decals)
• aftermarket modifications (truck boxes, spinning rims, tow hitches, winches)
• officer safety issues (tinted windows, gun rack, grill guard, raised chassis)
• driver description
• number and description of passengers
• suspected crimes and weapons

Request backup to assist you in making the stop. If possible, don’t make a high risk traffic stop until backup arrives.

**Waiting for Backup**

If dispatch confirms the information you provided, you have reasonable suspicion to initiate the stop. Follow the suspect vehicle and maintain constant observation until backup arrives and you can identify a safe stopping location. Know your agency’s policies for safe speeds of travel during patrol, observation, and pursuit. Do not turn on the emergency equipment. If backup is unavailable from your agency, ask dispatch to request assistance from other agencies. A high risk stop should be conducted alone only if the driver’s behavior forces action, such as if the driver’s actions or vehicle movement places the public at immediate risk.

Not only are you required to request and, if prudent, wait for backup before acting, you must maintain radio contact with dispatch and with responding units. As circumstances change, update dispatch and backup on the movement and route of the suspect vehicle, activity of the occupants in the vehicle, and your observations of weapons or contraband. Regular updates to dispatch prevent confusion and a delay if backup officers arrive at the wrong location. Communication is an important task for you in any traffic stop. Periodically, you should request the location and estimated time of arrival (ETA) of the backup units. An accurate ETA helps you plan for the best stopping location.
UNIT 4 | HIGH RISK TRAFFIC STOPS

LESSON 2 | Coordinating the High Risk Stop

LESSON GOAL: At the end of this lesson, you will know how to safely coordinate a high risk traffic stop.

The key to safely conducting a high risk traffic stop is for an officer to know their patrol area. Knowing this will help an officer keep the incident contained and safe for the officers involved. It is impossible to predict the exact stopping location of the suspect vehicle, but an officer should use common sense; every effort should be made not to conduct a high risk stop in places where people gather in large numbers, such as on active school grounds, at a ball field, or at a busy shopping center.

Coordinating the Stop
Before the backup officers arrive, the primary officer should have a plan for a safe stopping location. Safety is crucial for the primary officer, the backup officers, and others who may be nearby. In an ideal situation, the following conditions for a safe stopping location are critical to officer and public safety:

- It is visible to officers and oncoming traffic.
- It is away from heavy pedestrian traffic and heavy vehicle traffic.
- It is large enough to accommodate backup units and on a wide and straight roadway to accommodate two or more patrol vehicles.
- It is in an open or rural area (versus a business area) with light traffic.
- It has an unobstructed view between the suspect vehicle, the patrol units, and oncoming traffic.
- It is in a place that vehicular and pedestrian traffic can be stopped or redirected to a safe location.

The primary officer will coordinate the stopping site once the backup units have arrived, picking a location before the actual stop is initiated. Using the radio, the primary officer will direct the responding patrol units to positions of backup or control of the driver and passengers in the suspect vehicle. Every officer needs to know what is expected of each position, so that they can provide support for the group to work safely and effectively as a team.

When there is enough backup to initiate the high risk stop, the primary officer should request a secure channel for emergency traffic and give dispatch the location of the stop, as well as information on the actions and behavior of the vehicle’s passengers.

OBJECTIVES
LE027.4. Summarize the necessary safety factors to consider when deciding when and where to conduct a high risk traffic stop.
LE027.5. Explain how to safely initiate the stopping sequence when conducting a high risk traffic stop.
LE027.6. Identify the proper positioning and distance between the primary patrol vehicle and the suspect’s vehicle during a high risk traffic stop.
LE027.7. Position the primary patrol vehicle safely while conducting a high risk traffic stop.
LE027.8. Position the backup patrol vehicle(s) and officer(s) safely while conducting a high risk traffic stop.
LE278.1. Decide if the pursuit is legal, feasible, and necessary, prior to initiating a suspect motor vehicle pursuit.
Use of Emergency Equipment
After selecting the stopping location and communicating with dispatch and backup, the primary officer should turn on the patrol vehicle’s emergency red or blue lights to direct the driver to stop. Keep the emergency lights on throughout the entire stop. Using emergency lighting is for officer safety, both day and night. Use the patrol vehicle’s takedown lights, high beams, and spotlight during a night stop to illuminate the interior of the suspect’s vehicle.

The primary officer may use the siren if the driver does not respond to the emergency lights and may also use the PA system to give directions to the driver of the suspect vehicle.

Positioning the Primary Patrol Vehicle
In accordance with agency policies and procedures, once the suspect vehicle stops, the primary officer should park the patrol vehicle so that the driver’s door of the suspect vehicle is visible. Stop at a safe distance behind the suspect vehicle. A greater distance behind the suspect vehicle will provide you with more protection. Keep your patrol vehicle running in case you need to react to changes in the situation.

Agency policy and the physical situation (terrain, type of intersection, whether it is a highway or street, officer safety) both help the officer determine how far to offset and angle the primary patrol vehicle. Generally, the primary patrol vehicle should be offset towards the driver’s side of the suspect vehicle. The nose of the primary patrol vehicle should be angled towards the center of the suspect vehicle.

Positioning the Backup Patrol Vehicles
A high risk traffic stop usually involves multiple backup units. The first backup patrol vehicle should generally be positioned to the right of the primary patrol vehicle. That vehicle should be offset to the passenger side with its nose angled towards the center of the suspect vehicle.

Position all backup vehicles two door widths apart so that all vehicle doors can open completely. During a night stop, focus the backup vehicle’s takedown lights, high beams, and spotlight on the suspect vehicle’s passenger side. Position a third vehicle (or fourth) to one side or to the rear of the primary vehicle at a slight angle.

All backup officers should remain in their area of cover and not approach the suspect vehicle. See Figure 10-8.

The officers’ employing agency might use other variations of vehicle positioning. See Figure 10-9.

Taking Cover Using the Patrol Vehicle
After the suspect vehicle has stopped and all patrol vehicles are properly positioned, all officers must use available cover to protect their safety. An officer’s patrol vehicle is the most effective and readily available cover. Officers will exit their vehicle and move to the rear of the patrol vehicle or crouch behind the vehicle’s doors, depending on agency
policies and procedures. Once the officers are in position, they should draw their firearms and point them at the suspect vehicle with their fingers outside the trigger guard. Officers should visually locate all other responding officers, and position themselves to avoid being caught in a crossfire situation. Positions are also dictated by the situation at hand. Events are fluid, so flexibility is required.

If the driver pulls away after the stop is initiated, officers should make a second attempt to pull over the vehicle. If the suspect does not stop, you must decide whether the situation is legal, feasible, and necessary, and meets your agency’s criteria for pursuit. If your supervisor advises against pursuing or advises you to cancel the pursuit at any time, you must comply.