



Division of Police

Keeping our Roadways Safe is a Community Effort

Traffic complaints – whether it is speed on residential streets, vehicles failing to stop for stop signs or driver inattention in school zones – are one of the most common reasons residents contact the Gahanna Division of Police. Social media has been the frequent outlet for many individuals to express frustration with discourteous drivers or traffic scofflaws. As we enter our 10th traffic fatality-free month in Gahanna (following 41 fatality-free months prior to June of 2018), traffic safety and reducing the number of crashes remains one of our primary missions.

Gahanna has over 325 lane miles of residential streets, roadways and parts of Interstate 270 within its jurisdiction. More crashes occur within the city's section of IR-270 than any other roadway. To date, nearly 30% of the city's annual crashes have been on IR-270. In March over 43% of all crash responses occurred within Gahanna's portion of the interstate. Excessive speed, abrupt lane changes, following too closely, and impaired and distracted driving are the primary causes of these crashes. As a note of interest, the city of Gahanna is responsible for responding to and investigating IR-270 crashes within its jurisdiction, not other police agencies.

High traffic volume, speed, limited visibility, distracted motorists, and other factors associated with crash scenes frequently expose first responders to many risks and hazards. Stabilizing the impacted area, treating and transporting the injured, and conducting a thorough investigation, while attempting to minimize delays and

disruptions for other motorists is often challenging. These challenges are compounded by drivers consumed with their own priorities or those whose attention is focused on the use of electronic devices rather than the safe operation of their vehicle. Tragically, too many police officers, firefighters, and tow truck drivers have lost their lives while helping crash victims. We take the response to traffic crashes and the risks associated with them very seriously, just as we take our obligation to reduce their occurrence through traffic enforcement, crash analysis, multi-agency operations, and public outreach.

While the interstate presents its own unique challenges, so do our school zones and residential streets. Like most agencies, our volume of calls-for-service combined with other responsibilities can exceed the capacity of the patrol officers assigned to a particular shift. As a result, we are precluded from assigning an officer to each school zone on a daily basis or to send an officer to every residential street associated with a traffic complaint.

We are fortunate in that Gahanna has a relatively low incidence of pedestrian and bicycle-involved crashes (typically less than ten combined per year and none this year in any of the school zones). We patrol school zones in order to provide a visible deterrence to aggressive driving behaviors. Through student engagement initiatives, our officers also educate young people about vehicle and pedestrian safety.

In order to balance resources with the need to respond to public requests for increased traffic enforcement on a particular roadway, we make every effort to identify high-risk locations and respond in ways that have the greatest impact on public and roadway safety. We use a variety of tools to respond to residential complaints. These include traffic volume and speed survey equipment, a mobile speed monitoring and notification device to create public awareness, and posting officers in marked vehicles for high-visibility enforcement.

Beyond addressing specific public complaints or mitigating the incidence of crashes, proactive traffic enforcement efforts are an invaluable tool used by law enforcement to discover, deter, and reduce all types of criminal activity. Simply put, we try to enhance overall public safety by intercepting suspected criminals on the roadway (who are perhaps on their way to or from having committed a more serious crime) and taking appropriate action. Traffic enforcement resulting in the arrest of drivers or other vehicle occupants following the discovery of outstanding warrants, illegal firearms and drugs, and stolen property, is commonplace. This is one reason why there is no such thing as a “routine” traffic stop – every officer knows that every stop has the potential to escalate into a deadly encounter with an armed individual.

While traffic safety is one of our primary missions, it is not one we can fully accomplish without you – the public. We urge drivers to maintain focus on the roadway around them, maintain a safe and legal speed, slow down or move over for stopped emergency vehicles, and we remind drivers to eliminate distractions – especially from mobile devices. Think of it as the “golden rule” of driving in your neighborhood – drive like you would want others to drive in front of your home.

With the change to warmer weather and the busy summer months soon upon us, we ask that you exercise patience to help make our roadways and neighborhoods safer and to set a great example for our young drivers. Because we in law enforcement cannot do it alone, we must continue to partner with you for a safer Gahanna!

~ By Jeffrey B. Spence

Jeff Spence is the Chief of Police, a 27 year veteran of the department and resident of Gahanna.

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with us**



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