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>> Police Impersonators: What Motorists Can Do (06/18/04)

A Message From Sheriff Ted Mink

- ✓ The Jefferson County Sheriff's Office and a few metro area police agencies have recently taken reports about people impersonating police officers and attempting to make traffic stops using unmarked cars with flashing lights.
- ✓ The danger presented by impersonators exists on several levels. The crime itself can turn violent. Impersonators also present a great threat to the public, in that they undermine the public's trust in the law enforcement community at large. In addition, there is a concern that some citizens may create a dangerous situation by eluding real officers, because they are fearful of impersonators.



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A real law enforcement vehicle or officer should be easily recognizable. The Jefferson County Sheriff's Office uses unmarked vehicles that have ample emergency lighting: bright red and blue strobe lights in the grill and windshield. Uniformed deputies display the proper insignia at all times, and are expected to carry business cards.

Following are some recommendations for motorists if they are in doubt as to the validity of a traffic stop. These are general recommendations; not all agencies nationwide will follow the same guidelines. Your best bet is to be alert, follow your instincts and use common sense.

In Your Car

If you are signaled to pull over by an unmarked car, and the vehicle seems suspicious to you, you have some options:

- Slow down. Signal your compliance by slowing down and activating your hazard lights. If it is a legitimate traffic stop, you do not want to appear to be eluding the officer. While driving slowly with hazard lights on, you may do one of the following.
- Make a call. Use a cell phone to dial 911 and ask for assistance in verifying that the vehicle in question is being driven by a law enforcement officer. The dispatcher will not tell you why you are being stopped - he or she will only verify the agency making the stop.
- See the light. If you are in a dark area, you may activate your vehicle's emergency flashers, slow down, and proceed to a lighted public location.

The Officer

If you believe someone to be impersonating an officer, look closely:

- Insignias. Pay attention to the officer's appearance. Look to see that the badge and shoulder patch reflect a law enforcement agency and do not say "security" or otherwise indicate a private security company.
- Attire. The officer's uniform should look like a uniform from head to toe - no mismatched pants, etc. (It is rare for a motorist to be pulled over by a plainclothes officer.) Also, a law enforcement officer in uniform will be carrying a gun and other equipment on a gun belt.
- Identification. Officers in uniform will have a nameplate easily visible on their shirts. You may also ask to see an I.D. badge or a business card from an officer in uniform or in plainclothes.
- Tell the officer your concerns. If you convey your concerns to the officer, he or she will better understand your actions and may voluntarily provide you with a business card or other proof of employment.

[Click here](#) to learn more about the uniforms worn by Jefferson County Sheriff's Office employees.

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