



MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

POLICE DEPARTMENT



**What should I
do if I am stopped or
contacted by the
police?**



**A guide for the
MSU Community**

As members of your Michigan State University Police Department, we have developed this guide to help you understand why you might be contacted by an officer and how you can expect to be treated. It's important for you to understand what to expect when an officer approaches you on the street or when you are driving your car.

We also want you to know that you may make either compliments or complaints about an officer's actions at any time. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact us. We want to hear from you!

Jim Dunlap,
Police Chief and Director



What should I do if I'm contacted on the street?

If a police officer contacts you on the street, he or she has a reason. The officer may have reason to believe that you are in violation of the law. It's also possible that a crime was committed nearby and the officer thinks that you might be able to help.

In any case, **DON'T RUN** from the officer. Be calm. Find out what the officer wants. Don't assume that you know the reason for being contacted. Provide identification when asked. Answer questions truthfully. You have the right to ask questions of the officer. In doing so, **REMAIN CALM**. Yelling, threatening, or arguing with the officer will only make the situation more difficult.

What should I do if I'm pulled over in my car?

If you are driving a car and an officer signals you to stop, you must pull over. Stay in your car. If it's dark, turn on the interior light. Do not leave your car unless directed to do so by the officer.

Keep your hands on the steering wheel. Wait for the officer to approach your vehicle. The officer will request your license, registration, and proof of insurance. Police officers are trained to obtain identification first, then provide an explanation for the stop. Please provide the officer with the required documents. **An MSU police officer will always inform you of their reason for the traffic stop.**

Traffic violations are the most common reason for stopping a vehicle. However, you may also have been stopped for a registration or equipment violation. A criminal investigation may be another reason for being stopped. Your vehicle may match the description of a vehicle that was involved in a crime.

At some point during the stop, the officer may ask you and any passengers to exit your car. This request may be for safety reasons, or the officer may suspect illegal contraband in the car. The courts have upheld the officer's right to make such a request, and require compliance.

Our actions during a traffic stop are guided by the fact that many police officers are assaulted and/or killed each year during traffic stops. In fact, according to the Uniform Crime Report, hundreds of police officers are assaulted during traffic-related contacts each year. Our goal is to protect you, the motorist, and to ensure our own safety.

Finally, if you are issued a citation, **DON'T ARGUE** at the scene. You have the right to contest a citation before a judge or magistrate at a later time. This doesn't *require* the services of an attorney, and the time involved is often minimal. Associated Students of MSU (ASMSU) Legal Services is an additional resource for information for MSU students.

I'd like to speak with someone regarding the officer's actions.

What can I do?

Your comments are important to us. If you would like to compliment or make a complaint about an officer's actions, please do one of the following:

- Call us at 517-355-2221 and ask to speak with a supervisor.
- Complete a form online at police.msu.edu.
- Write a note or letter and mail it to the Police Chief and Director at the address listed on the back of this brochure.

You may also contact the Police Oversight Committee. This neutral committee consists of elected students, faculty and staff. It accepts complaints against police officers and makes recommendations to the Police Chief and Director. The committee may be reached by calling 517-432-2256 or by forwarding a written complaint to:

**Police Oversight Committee
Secretary for Academic Governance
Owen Graduate Hall
735 E. Shaw Lane, Room W-32
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48825
oversight@police.msu.edu**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Why does the officer ask for identification first?

A: The officer is trained to do so. When a person is stopped for a traffic violation, they are required by Michigan law to present their license, registration, and current proof of insurance to the officer. In situations other than a traffic stop, this is so the officer knows the name of the person they are contacting and is generally done for investigative and safety reasons.

Q: When a traffic stop is initiated at night, why does the officer appear to “sneak up” on the driver and shine their lights into the car?

A: It is a safety precaution for the officer. Officers are trained to minimize their exposure to traffic and potential danger from inside the vehicle. The bright light illuminates the interior of the vehicle.

Q: If I’m pulled over for a traffic violation, why do other police cars sometimes show up?

A: It is not uncommon for officers who are in close proximity to check on one another, even when they are not requested. Again this is for safety reasons.

Q: Why does the officer sit in the car for so long? What is the officer doing?

A: The officer usually takes the time to verify your driving status and vehicle registration. The officer does this as quickly as possible, but there can sometimes be delays in the computer response.

Definition of Reasonable Cause

There is no exact definition of reasonable cause. It is based on the totality of circumstances. For example, a police officer might have reasonable cause to administer a breath analysis test to an individual that appears to be under the age of 21 and the individual has:

- An odor of alcoholic beverages on their breath or person
- Blood shot eyes
- Slurred speech
- Staggered walking
- Loud and unruly behavior
- Alcoholic beverages in their possession
- Vomited or is incapacitated

NOTE: THIS LIST IS NOT ALL INCLUSIVE

Learn more about
Michigan State University
Community Team Policing at:
police.msu.edu

For safety tips on walking
and biking, check out:
movesafe.police.msu.edu

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“Committed to Courtesy and
Excellence”



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