

## **MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF**

This pamphlet was developed to assist the citizens of Prince William County to better understand what to expect if they are stopped by an officer. Our goal is to ensure that all police related encounters conclude safely and within the guidelines set forth by the Constitution of the United States.

Law enforcement can be a complex and unpredictable profession. Each year, more than a hundred police officers are killed and thousands more injured or assaulted. As a result, we place a great deal of emphasis on officer safety and survival. These practices are instilled in our officers from the very first day of training. While these practices maximize the safety to the officers and citizens, their appearance may be perceived as impolite, cold, or offensive at times.

We recognize that there will be occurrences when citizens may have a negative contact with the police, and as a result they experience feelings of frustration or dissatisfaction.

Many times ill feelings may have resulted from a lack of understanding of police procedures. In addition, officers sometimes do not take the time or have the opportunity to fully explain why they took certain actions that may have appeared offensive to a citizen.

I hope that the information presented in this brochure will assist you in understanding what to expect if you are stopped by the police. If you have additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

**Barry M. Barnard**  
**Chief of Police**

## **QUESTIONS?**

Please contact us:

### **NON-EMERGENCY**

703-792-6500

### **CRIME PREVENTION UNIT**

703-792-7270

[crimeprevention@pwcgov.org](mailto:crimeprevention@pwcgov.org)

### **PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE**

703-792-7245

### **EASTERN DISTRICT POLICE STATION**

703-792-7200

### **WESTERN DISTRICT POLICE STATION**

703-792-5111

### **CENTRAL DISTRICT POLICE STATION**

703-792-8555

### **CHIEF OF POLICE**

703-792-6650

[WWW.PWCGOV.ORG/POLICE](http://WWW.PWCGOV.ORG/POLICE)

Thank you for taking the time to learn about your police department. If you have any questions or comments, feel free to contact me.

Barry M. Barnard, Chief of Police  
Prince William County Police Department  
1 County Complex Court  
Prince William, VA 22192

# **What To Do When Stopped by the Police**



**PRINCE WILLIAM  
COUNTY  
POLICE DEPARTMENT**



## **WHY THE POLICE STOP PEOPLE**

Police officers are trained to detect and investigate violations of laws and suspicious activities. Every situation is unique but some primary reasons for a stop may be:

- Moving traffic violation
- Equipment or safety concern about your vehicle
- Criminal Investigation
- Person(s) appear in need of assistance
- You are in an area where a crime just occurred
- You may fit the description of a suspect
- You have been pointed out as a witness, suspect, or a suspicious person
- You may have violated the law

## **IF YOU ARE APPROACHED BY POLICE ON THE STREET**

Innocent individuals are sometimes offended, even angered, because a Police Officer has detained them for questioning. Although the delay may be inconvenient, the officer believes there is a reason (reasonable suspicion) to stop and ask you questions. Many stops are initiated for one of the above reasons.

Once the officer is able to determine that you are or are not the individual he or she is looking for, the officer should explain the reason for the stop.

In the interest of safety, please provide your cooperation and compliance when approached by an officer. Keep your hands visible for your safety and the officer's. Assaulting an officer or acting in a disorderly manner will result in criminal charges being placed against you and you will be arrested.

## **IF YOU ARE STOPPED BY THE POLICE WHILE IN YOUR CAR**

- Safely pull your vehicle to the far right shoulder of the road. If the vehicle is unmarked, and you are unsure if it is a legitimate law enforcement officer, indicate that you know they are behind you by using your turn signal or flashers and continue to drive (not speeding) to a place that you feel safe, such as a convenience store or other well-lit area.
- If the vehicle is unmarked, you can ask to see the officer's identification. If you are still uneasy, ask the officer to have a marked police car respond, or call the Police non-emergency number (703-792-6500) on your cell phone to verify the officer's identity.
- Sit calmly, with your hands visible on the steering wheel. If you have passengers, ask them to sit quietly with their hands visible.
- Remain in your vehicle.
- Turn on the vehicle's interior light during hours of darkness.
- Inform the officer if you have a weapon (gun, knife, rifle) and/or a concealed handgun permit.
- Follow the officer's instructions.
- Produce license, registration, and proof of insurance when requested.
- Tell the officer where the items are BEFORE reaching for them, especially if they are tucked away in the glove box or some other place.
- Offer any explanations for your driving behavior before the officer returns to his/her vehicle.
- Don't become argumentative, disorderly, or abusive.

Virginia law requires a driver to show his or her operator's license and registration information upon request of a Police Officer, regardless of whether the officer is in uniform or not.

## **YOU MAY BE SEARCHED**

Police officers may at any time request permission to search a person, vehicle, or property. If permission is freely given, the officer may conduct a search as granted.

According to Virginia law, you will be searched in the following circumstances:

- When arrested
- When a warrant exists for you
- When you have given consent

You could also be searched for these reasons:

- When probable cause exists which indicates a law has been violated
- When the officer suspects you may be armed

## **WHAT TO DO IF YOU FEEL FRUSTRATED OR DISSATISFIED**

You may seek an explanation from the officer or the officer's supervisor afterward. If you feel frustrated or dissatisfied by the explanation you get, please contact the appropriate District police station and request to speak to a supervisor. The time to discuss your displeasure is not during the stop.

It is the policy of the Police Department to accept and investigate all complaints or allegations of misconduct on the part of any employee. In doing so, the Department will endeavor to be fair to both the complainant and the employee(s) involved. Your complaint can be made in writing, by telephone, or in person.

Once your complaint has been received, it will be investigated according to appropriate procedures and you will be notified of the results. The Police Department encourages the filing of legitimate complaints as a means to hold the Department and its employees accountable to the public.