

Sheriff Column

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Red Means Stop, Stop sign means Stop!

As Sheriff of course I get a lot of input from many people regarding many different things. One of the more unending and intriguing complaints I seem to get more and more often are the complaints that “nobody seems to want to stop at red lights or stop signs anymore.” I’m then told that everyone is in such a hurry to get somewhere these days that it is really dangerous sharing the road with all these impatient people!

My observation is that the need that many people feel to be in more than one place at any one time or be somewhere 5 or 10 minutes ago is a natural human response to the way our society has suddenly become such an “instantaneous” place. I can find instant answers on the internet these days or I can sit on my couch and get instant access to drama, music, news, weather, headlines, sports scores-whatever I think I need. I can instantly turn a channel if I don’t like what I see on the television or what I hear on the radio. If I’m using an IPOD or ITOUCH I can instantly skip over what I don’t want to see or hear and instantly search for more options.

I’m thinking that if this is possible why can’t I snap my fingers and instantly be somewhere else. Actually driving safely, taking my time and respectfully sharing the road with other drivers just seems so “old fashioned.” Don’t we have to go, go, go to be happy and successful?

The true answer to this question is that sometimes you really do need to stop, stop and stop to be happy, safe and successful! This is especially true if you intend to “turn right on red.” Wisconsin law does allow a driver to turn right on a red light but only after you have STOPPED and after stopping you can then safely proceed after yielding to other moving traffic in the intersection. This yielding includes yielding to pedestrians and bicycle traffic.

The three locations which generate the most complaints I receive are the intersection of US Hwy 14 and County Trunk O near Kwik Trip, the US Hwy 14 and Sextonville Road intersection in front of Community First Bank and the 4-way stop downtown between the courthouse and downtown Kwik Trip.

I often hear that life is described as "a journey." If this is the case it sure would be nice if we all could slow down a bit, drive safely and enjoy the journey to wherever it is we are rushing to go.

The cost of rolling through a stop sign, increasing our speed to get through a yellow light or not stopping while "taking a right turn on red" can be very high. With the \$30 fine for not stopping and all the surcharges added to the cost of a traffic citation (ticket) these days the cost easily exceeds \$100 and is usually closer to \$200 in most cases. The cost of fixing a damaged vehicle has also significantly increased over the years. And heaven forbid, the costs associated with a serious injury or death involving this type of traffic violation can truly be a daunting and life altering tragedy.

If life is truly a journey- lets make it a safe journey a journey, one that includes stopping on red, stopping when we see a STOP sign and slowing down as we enter that intersection. Life does not have to be as instant as we may think.

Stay safe and have a great summer! Enjoy all that Richland County has to offer this summer. The month of June in Richland Center and Richland County is a particularly busy place TAKE THE TIME TO ENJOY IT SAFELY.

Sheriff Darrell Berglin