

March 2012 Sheriff Column

“Black marks, burn outs and NASCAR”

Like many of you I have really enjoyed getting out and moving around to enjoy the early spring temperatures and unbelievable warm weather we have been experiencing in mid to late March this year. What I don't enjoy is the return of the black marks, burn outs and donuts left on our local roadways that seem to appear this time of year.

I don't know if it's because of the record-setting temperatures or the return of the NASCAR car races on television but there just seems to be more “burn out” black marks on the roads this year then ever before. I don't recall when the celebratory spinning of the race car causing the smoking tires after winning a car race started-but it seems like they show that shot on the television news these days on every Sunday night newscast and all day on Monday too.

While “smoking your tires” may be the “cool” way to celebrate in the “controlled environment” of a race track as designated by NASCAR and car racing fans-it certainly isn't a safe or “cool” maneuver in the real world. These black marks and donuts that are left behind as markers of such activity are more than just ugly to see on the roadway. The individuals responsible for these displays are involved in an activity that is very dangerous and destructive to our roads. If you have been a witness to seeing these black marks created you certainly would agree that these actions are very dangerous.

Because of this danger and the eyesore these marks leave behind, I recently decided to address the issue and hopefully enlist your cooperation in identifying those individuals responsible for creating the black marks that damage our roads and these people accountable.

I have instructed my deputies that this type of behavior with a motor vehicle is not acceptable and that each provable case requires an enforcement action, “NOT A WARNING”! Charges in these activities could range from a county ordinance violation of “display of power” to the serious traffic charge of “reckless driving” or even “endangering safety by reckless driving.” If there is a passenger in the offending vehicle or another person who is in the near vicinity of this reckless act I feel the most serious charge possible should be brought forth. I have spoken to Richland County District Attorney Jennifer Harper

about this issue and I have asked for her cooperation in prosecuting these cases the fullest extent of the law.

My deputies have taken enforcement action regarding this reckless driving in the past. Last fall one individual was convicted for this behavior and then ordered to pay restitution to the county highway department for cleanup and fixing damage to the roadway. Holding these individuals accountable for their actions seems to me to be the correct course of action. This cannot be done just by law enforcement however.

Very seldom, if ever, does the offending individual perform this reckless maneuver in front of a law enforcement officer. Yes, we also did have that occur last fall-but that was a rare situation. Nearly all of these cases require input from the public, an eyewitness. Once we receive the information, law enforcement can then initiate an investigation to “tie in” the responsible person.

Information such as the color of the offending vehicle or identifying distinguishing marks on the vehicle or the model or manufacturer of the vehicle can be an important link to making a good case. The time of the incident is also very important information officers need to build a provable case.

Similar to vandalism and damage to property crimes, many offenders involved in such activity seek attention for their actions and talking or bragging about it is common. Passing on this information to law enforcement can also help develop a case. Receiving this type of information from the public is another tool to allow law enforcement to focus its investigation.

As for the social aspects of these roadside black marks I look at them as I do broken windows and painted graffiti in a neighborhood. They send a message. A message that says, “we don’t care-do what you want.” It’s a message that unfortunately does exist in some areas of this country. I know I am only one person in our community but I want to go on record as saying that I have no tolerance for this type of activity and I will do whatever I can to stop this reckless activity and eyesore.

I am asking our citizens to watch for this type of erratic driving in your neighborhood, I would then ask that you call the sheriff's department or any other law enforcement agency of your choosing and let them know about it. If you wish to talk to me personally or in private about this, you can ask the dispatcher to contact me about your call or leave a voice mail.

Sheriff Darrell Berglin