

Ask the Chief

Dear Chief: How come sometimes you issue a ticket and other times someone might just get away with a verbal warning?

Dear Concerned Citizen: With literally hundreds of traffic violations on the books and a limited number of police officers we must prioritize our enforcement (tickets) on violations and violators that pose the greatest risk to public safety. Traffic warnings are normally written to those who have committed minor violations; violations less likely to cause injury to self or others. Conversely, traffic tickets are normally written for more significant violations; violations more likely to cause injury to self or others. As an example, tickets are almost always written in situations that result in a motor vehicle accident.

APD prioritizes enforcement (tickets) in areas where accident data has shown there is an increased risk to our community members by virtue of number and severity of accidents. From this, we use proximate cause (types of violations) data from accident scenes to determine what violations (usually speeding, signal light violations, careless driving) we should be placing greater priority on. As part of our decision-making process we also consider things such as previous driving history, driver explanation, and whether or not voluntary compliance is achievable with a warning. As it relates to municipal code violations (nuisances) there is a greater likelihood of enforcement simply due to the fact these violations can, at times, disrupt entire neighborhoods. However, we do have some discretion. For instance, your dog gets loose in your neighborhood for the first time ever and we are called. This may result in a warning because there have been no previous reports and the dog owner understands the issue and is willing to take actions to correct the situation. However, if the dog is always loose, continuously barking, vicious, or the owner has done nothing to correct the issue, the dog owner should expect a ticket.

Officers are encouraged to use discretion if and when appropriate while keeping in mind our goal of public safety. We expect officers to consider alternatives, consequences, and each should ultimately be able to tell a convincing story as to why the alternative they selected was the best alternative. We fully realize we will never make everyone happy, nor solve every problem, but this is a goal we can continually strive to achieve.

Craig Dodd, Chief of Police