

The Contact Phase

The contact phase of any vehicle stop begins after the officers have pulled over the vehicle they are stopping. Remember that the officers should properly position their vehicle(s) in relation to the vehicle they have stopped. Once properly positioned, the officer(s) will determine how he or she will approach the stopped vehicle. Tactical considerations in this decision include:

1. Environmental factors such as time of day, lighting, roadway conditions, and the presence of hazards.
2. The presence of bystanders.
3. The number of occupants in the stopped vehicle.
4. Known criminal history or threat level of the driver or other occupants.
5. Information received from the dispatcher before making the stop (vehicle or tag may be reported stolen or the vehicle may be listed as being utilized during the commission of a crime).
6. Whether or not backup units are available.

When initiating the contact phase of the risk stop, check for traffic before exiting your vehicle. Check the rearview and side-view mirrors and take a quick look over your left shoulder for any oncoming traffic. Once safely out of your vehicle, quietly close the door to the first notch.

If you have a partner and you have a portable radio, your partner can move forward and take a position to the right rear side of the stopped vehicle. This is a good tactic at night when the occupants of the stopped vehicle do not know there is a second officer present. If a one-officer unit is making the stop, the officer must observe the driver and occupants as he or she approaches the stopped vehicle.

If a two-officer unit is making the stop, the primary officer observes and makes contact with the driver while the secondary officer watches the actions of the occupants and looks for potential threats from bystanders.

Use your PA system to ask the driver to turn off the vehicle. At night, use the PA system to ask the driver to turn on the dome light in his or her vehicle.

The primary officer approaches the stopped vehicle on driver's side, as follows:

1. For safety, the officer(s) should not stand between their vehicle and the stopped vehicle. Later in the stop, the officer(s) should also not have the occupants of the stopped vehicle stand in this area either. Another vehicle could collide with the law enforcement vehicle injuring or killing anybody in front of it.
2. As you approach violator's vehicle look for the following:
 - a. License plate or registration tab expired or altered.
 - b. Trunk lid partially open (be especially careful if the trunk lock is missing).
 - c. The backup or brake lights coming on (the back-up lights coming on might show that the driver put the transmission in reverse and the brake lights coming on could mean the driver is shifting out of park).
 - d. "Print" the trunk of the vehicle and check the trunk lid to ensure that it is closed and locked. Your handprint on the trunk lid will tie you to that specific vehicle in the event the driver decides to drive off or you are injured or killed during the stop.
 - e. As you move forward of the trunk, watch occupants of the vehicle through the rear window and, if there is an someone in the rear seat:

- o Stop at the trailing edge of rear door and look through rear and side window(s).
- o Check the occupant(s), rear seat, floor, and rear window ledge for obvious weapons or contraband.

f. If there is an occupant in the rear seat of the vehicle, you should not position yourself forward of the rear-seat. A decision to pass an occupied rear seat is a judgment call based on the situation. Control the rear occupants' hands by having them place them on the back of the front seat. This allows you to watch their hands with your peripheral vision while making contact with the driver.

When dealing with multiple occupants within a vehicle one option is to have the driver get out of the vehicle. Have them bring the keys with them. Make contact with the driver behind and to the side of the stopped vehicle. Another option is to have all occupants exit the vehicle for officer safety.

If there are no occupants in the rear seat, check the area of the rear seat and floor for weapons or contraband and then move forward to the trailing edge of the driver-side door. Do not position yourself forward of the trailing edge of the driver side door.

Identify yourself to the driver of the stopped vehicle and give the reason for the stop. Ask driver of the stopped vehicle for specific identification like a driver license, vehicle registration, and insurance information. Have the driver remove the identification from the wallet. Never accept the driver's wallet. Check that the photo on the license matches the appearance of the driver. You may direct the driver to turn off the vehicle. You should have the driver put their hands on the steering wheel.

If you are going to return to your vehicle to run checks or issue a citation, do not lose sight of the occupants of the stopped vehicle. Tell the driver and occupants to remain in their car. Stay alert so that you can retreat or take cover quickly should the need arise. Stay alert so that if the stopped vehicle attempts to flee you can pursue.

After you run the vehicle and license checks, return to the stopped vehicle. Your approach should be similar to your initial approach and you should observe the same safety precautions. An alternative method of making contact with driver is to approach on the passenger side of the stopped vehicle. This approach allows the officer to approach on the side of the stopped vehicle away from traffic and reduces the possibility of passing vehicles hitting the officer. This approach adds the element of surprise because the driver of the stopped vehicle usually expects the officer to approach on the driver-side.

Should the stop escalate in violence the officer may have more avenues of escape, more cover, and more concealment on the passenger side (e.g., guard rails, trees, ditches, etc.). To make this type of approach, walk around the rear of your vehicle to its passenger-side (do not walk between your vehicle and the stopped vehicle). Approach the stopped vehicle slowly as you make your approach on its passenger-side.

Use the same procedures and precautions as with the driver-side approach. You will have to talk louder or tap on the window to get the attention of the driver. The driver will have to lean or slide over the seat to hand you his or her identification. This tactic is very effective in a night vehicle stop. One disadvantage in this tactic is that the driver is on the opposite side of the

vehicle and you will need to reposition yourself to effect an arrest.

A third alternative method of contacting the driver of the stopped vehicle is to tell him or her to come back to the your vehicle. This is a good tactic to use when dealing with multiple occupants in a vehicle, when you stop a vehicle with darkly tinted windows, or when you stop a paneled van.

When you tell the driver of the stopped vehicle to come back to your vehicle, you should follow these basic procedures:

1. Move to the right side of your vehicle, away from traffic.
2. Request the driver to step out of his or her vehicle, with their driver's license, registration, and insurance card, and come back toward your vehicle.
3. Tell the driver of the stopped vehicle to stand at the right-rear side of his or her vehicle or near the right-front fender of your vehicle.

Do not allow the driver to stand between his or her vehicle and your vehicle. Maintain a proper safety zone between you and the driver of the stopped vehicle. If there is a sidewalk, both the driver of the stopped vehicle and the officer should stand on the sidewalk. Keep the driver of the stopped vehicle facing you with his or her back toward the stopped vehicle. This allows the officer to observe the driver of the stopped vehicle, any occupants still in the stopped vehicle, and the stopped vehicle itself. Control of the driver of the stopped vehicle is particularly important at this stage, especially if there are other occupants in the vehicle. Officer safety is your primary concern.

Remember too; be aware of where your violator is when your dispatcher has information for you. You do not want the violator to overhear your dispatcher giving you critical information on them. When the dispatcher has information for you tell them to standby then separate yourself from the violator. Once you are clear, ask the dispatcher to transmit the information. If you are going to affect an arrest after completing the driver and vehicle checks, you should plan how you will accomplish the arrest safely.

If you have a partner, plan whether or not your partner will approach the vehicle with you. If you do not have a partner, consider the risk of making the arrest alone. If you feel that the risk is controllable and that you can safely arrest the driver go ahead and do so.

Call for a backup unit if you feel you need assistance in making the arrest safely.

If a the stop escalates to a high-risk stop, consider the following emergency procedures:

1. Put as much distance between you and suspect as quickly as possible.
2. Look for a position of advantage that will give you a tactical advantage. Remember you may not always be able to get back to the safety of your vehicle.
3. If you can reach your vehicle, try to retreat by backing away from the threat but be sure to straighten the front wheels of your vehicle before backing up.
4. Communicate with your partner and your dispatcher immediately when you recognize the threat.

The Closure Phase

The threat involved in a vehicle stop does not end until the officer releases the stopped vehicle. After completing the vehicle stop, the officer should help the driver maneuver the vehicle safely

back into traffic. The stopped vehicle should depart before you do. You may have to direct traffic to help the vehicle safely enter the traffic flow.

In summary, be professional, maintain your composure and do not overreact to the situation. Maintain visual observation of the driver of the stopped vehicle along with all occupants and be aware of potential threats around the area of the stop. Do not let the driver or any of the occupants of a stopped vehicle approach you while you sit in it – get out of your vehicle. The risk traffic stop deserves all of your attention from the preparation phase through the closure phase.