

## Traffic Matters Winter Has Arrived



I would like to introduce myself to the community I swore to protect. My name is Anthony Goldstein and I am the new Traffic Sergeant. I have been a police officer for almost 24 years and I want you to know how important traffic is to me. Much like some of you, serious traffic-related incidents have negatively impacted my life. A close relative was struck by a hit-and-run driver, one of my college professors died as a result of a car crash, and a friend was needlessly murdered as a result of a road-rage incident. It's an understatement when I say traffic matters to me. Consequently, I have made it my mission to educate motorists as to the dangers lurking around every corner of our roadways.

One such tragedy affected our very own department. In February of 2004, a Buffalo Grove Police Officer named Chris Senese was conducting stationary traffic enforcement on a side street in our town. As he was legally parked on the roadway, he was rear ended by another driver who did not fully clear the snow off their car and as a result did not see the squad car parked on the side of the road. Officer Senese sustained a catastrophic injury as a result of this crash, which prematurely ended his twelve-year career with the Village of Buffalo Grove. This horrific tragedy could have easily been prevented had the driver taken five

minutes to properly clear the snow from their car.

Now that winter has arrived in full force again, I think it is important to reiterate the importance of completely removing any snow and/or ice that has accumulated on your vehicle prior to beginning your commute. If a driver couldn't see a fully marked police car parked on the roadway because the driver's vehicle's windows were not clear of debris, I venture to say that it would be equally difficult to see a



vehicle emerge from a side road or worse yet a pedestrian crossing in the street.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) found it takes the average driver one and a half seconds to perceive a threat and take evasive maneuvers. This shows drivers are already at a disadvantage unless they have the ability to fully

see through their car windows and anticipate behaviors before requiring a reaction. In order to prevent a crash while driving, a driver needs to be constantly vigilant to all potential hazards not just what is directly in front of him or her. A driver only has a chance to slow down, change lanes, or make another maneuver to prevent a crash if they have the ability to fully see their surroundings. I think most people would agree that taking five additional minutes to clear the snow from their car is worth saving a life... so why aren't we doing it all the time?

Clearing your car windows of debris is not just important to prevent a crash, but it is

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also the law. Illinois vehicle code 12-503 states that no person shall drive a motor vehicle with snow, ice, moisture, or other material on any of the window or mirror surfaces, which materially obstructs the driver's clear view of the road. It is also a good idea to remember to keep your headlights, brake lights, and license plate clear of any debris too.

A vehicle's headlights are designed to light up the area in front of the car and the taillights along with the brake lights are intended to alert drivers of a motorist's intention to turn or stop. These safety features will not work effectively if they are covered with snow. Motorists operating vehicles without visible headlights, taillights, and brake lights are putting other commuters in harms way. Additionally, it is not just good common sense; it is a matter of Illinois law that requires vehicle operators to ensure these lighting features function as engineered. Illinois Vehicle Code 12-201 states a vehicle's headlights must be seen at a distance of 1,000 feet during certain times, while taillights and brake lights shall be visible for at least 500 feet. While we are on the subject, 12-201 also requires drivers to ensure their rear license plate be clearly legible from a distance of 50 feet to the rear. Folks, if we can't see the plates, we have no way of being able to know whether this requirement has been fulfilled and there is a good chance you will be stopped.

Moreover, don't limit yourself to just clearing your car windows of snow. Have you ever been driving down the road and the snow is blowing off the car in front of you? I know I have! In the police world, this is called 'snow luggage' and it can effectively blind other driver's view of the road and is completely unsafe. There are many snow removal products

available that help make removing snow from the hood, trunk, and roof of your vehicle easier, so snow blowing off your vehicle isn't blinding other drivers.

According to NHTSA, crashes are on the rise at a rate of 7.2 percent, which represents the largest increase in nearly fifty years! These concepts are so simple and yet can be the difference in your life or the life of somebody you care about. I know it is bitterly cold outside, but please take the five extra minutes and remove the snow from your car and drive safely this winter season. I know Officer Senese would have appreciated it if he was still with us.