

How To Get The Most Out Of Your Police Department

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How To Get The Most Out Of Your Police Department

Laws and police procedures vary from city to city and state to state. The information given here is of a general nature and is not intended in any way to replace the procedures and recommendations of your law enforcement agency. Refer to your law enforcement agency if there is any doubt as to the procedures to be followed.

HELP THE POLICE HELP YOU

1. Keep an inventory of all valuables including descriptions and serial numbers and photographs.
2. Mark TV, VCR, computers, etc., with your driver's license number preceded or followed by your two-letter state abbreviation. (or use whatever ID number your department suggests such as social security number). A driver's license number is probably best. A police officer a thousand miles away finding your TV in the trunk of a car will have your name in a matter of minutes using the driver's license number. If you have reported the theft to your department, the description and ANY serial number will be entered into the National Crime Information Center computer. If you don't know the item is missing and have not reported it, then the driver's license number becomes more valuable. The police in any state can teletype your police department and have them contact you about any questionable property.

CALLS FOR SERVICE

1. Know the telephone number for your police department. Not just 911 but the regular number for routine business.
2. Use 911 only for emergencies involving imminent danger to life and/or property. Most agencies do not have unlimited personnel to answer 911 calls. If several people are using 911 to report their cat in the tree or their neighbor's loud music, then your real emergency will have to wait until a line comes open.
3. Don't get upset when you call to report an incident or inquire about a case and are switched to several different people. The larger the agency, the more specialized it is. Your call may be routed to the division handling your type of problem or question such as traffic, juvenile, detectives, burglary, and the list goes on. You may have to talk to several people before finding the officer

actually assigned to your case, or to take your report.

4. Don't request that an officer come to your house if the report you wish to give can be handled over the phone. If there is nothing for the officer to see at your home or other location, then give the report over the phone. Many agencies have hired and trained civilian employees to give information and take simple reports over the phone.

If your car has just been stolen, give the information by phone as quickly as possible using 911. Officers on the street can be notified immediately and the information entered into the national computer. Demanding to see an officer in person will only delay this process and who's to say the officer won't pass your car on the way to your house to see what kind of car you own! It has happened!

This goes for burglary and other crimes where an officer will need to know what he's looking for. Always give all the information you can on the phone. Even though an officer must come to your home to make a burglary report, he may be able to spot your stolen blue and purple "fratastatic wobulator" while he's enroute if you gave the dispatcher that information.

DOCUMENT ALL CALLS

5. If you have a problem important enough to call the police for, insist that a report be made, and ask for the case or report number. Refer to this number when inquiring about your case. If you want to take action against your neighbors for their loud parties or barking dogs, you'll be in a better position to do so if all your calls to the police concerning these matters are documented. This goes for other types of "problem" cases also.

6. Don't expect police to make arrests for minor offenses that are not occurring when they arrive. Police must usually observe any minor violations in order to make an arrest. Reports must be written, witnesses interviewed, evidence reviewed and warrants obtained. Felonies may be a different matter. If you point to a fleeing suspect and say "he just robbed me" or "he just broke into my house", there will probably be an arrest made if the suspect can be caught.

7. Police generally have no authority in "civil" matters such as landlord/tenant disputes, property line disputes, breaches of contract, employer/employee disputes over pay and other matters, and similar disputes. The police will respond to prevent violence if necessary, and will inform involved parties of their need to consult attorneys, small

claims court, etc.

INFORMATION USUALLY RELEASED TO THE PUBLIC

1. Details of a crime, including the location, date and time.
2. The name of the victim.
3. The facts surrounding an arrest such as any resistance encountered, and if any weapons were involved.
4. Identifying facts about a suspect. (except name until formally charged)
5. A general description of evidence.
6. Names of investigating and/or arresting officers.
7. The nature of the charges to be filed and the court they will be filed in.

INFORMATION NOT USUALLY RELEASED TO THE PUBLIC

1. Names of witnesses.
2. Information about confessions and statements, etc.
3. Lab results.
4. Criminal history information
5. Names of juveniles.
6. Names of persons killed or injured until next-of-kin have been notified.
7. Any information that, if released, would jeopardize an investigation.

TIPS TO REMEMBER

1. Mark all valuables when practical with an engraving tool. (your police agency may have a program allowing you to borrow one) Know the license number and have the Vehicle Identification Number recorded for your vehicles.
2. Secure your property.
3. Document all calls for police service by having a report made.

4. Get good descriptions of suspects and vehicles.
5. Consult your police agency or district attorney and find out what your rights are concerning family violence and crime victim compensation.
6. When you withhold information about a crime, you're not hurting the police; only the crime victim!