

How traffic stops can help reduce violent crime



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Slow down. Buckle up. Don't drink.

The Albuquerque Police Department pulled over 12,000 more people in 2018 than it did in the previous year and the men and women in blue are not stopping.

Their purpose, however, is not to make money off those pesky speeding tickets. It's to stop murders, robberies and burglaries.

In Target 7's search for solutions to the crime crisis, we found the Police Department is using a strategy that studies show is reducing violent crime one traffic stop at a time.

It's called D-Dacts. It stands for "data driven approaches to crime and traffic safety". It is a strategy that has been tried in dozens of cities across the country.

"You don't hear about walk-by shootings so much. You hear about drive-by shootings," said Peggy Schaefer, a former North Carolina police officer who teaches D-DACTS across the country. "When the officer makes the stop, the blue lights are on the community and individuals driving by see there are police officers in the neighborhood. There is a clear deterrent effect."

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration supports and funds the program. Analysts are trained to track trends such as hours and days of the week when serious crime occurs. They develop maps that are then given to police officers who then look for speeders at very specific times and locations.

Their goal is not to write tickets. They want to catch criminals. So, when someone is pulled over for a traffic violation, the officer will check the driver to see if they are wanted, smell for drugs and look through the window to see if there are any guns or narcotics within plain view.

This week, APD pulled over a man who had eight warrants. He was driving 11 miles per hour over the speed limit.

"That traffic stop took a criminal off the streets," said APD Lt. Zak Cottrell, who oversees APD's traffic unit. "By contacting these bad guys that are out there, we are having an effect. They are driving cars to and from the crimes they are committing."

So, does it work? D-DACTS has been tried in cities such as Corpus Christi, Amarillo, Nashville and Philadelphia.

There police saw a 32 percent reduction in violent crime and 23 drop traffic in crashes within three years.

Here in Albuquerque in the first three months of the year, APD has made 46 percent more traffic stops than it did in the same time period two years ago.

Robberies, auto thefts and burglaries have also have gone down.

“Every traffic stop leads to valuable intelligence information,” Shafer said. “So, not only do you find out who the individual is who is driving in an area you get that intelligence.”

D-DACTS is not easy to implement. Experts say that some departments have struggled because they don't have enough manpower or trained analysts that can tell officers where and when to conduct traffic stops.