

NEWS RELEASE

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Louisiana trooper living testament to importance of “moving over”

BATON ROUGE – As far as Louisiana State Police Trooper Robert A. Harrison Jr. is concerned, assisting a motorist or writing a traffic ticket on the shoulder of a busy roadway is one of the most dangerous parts of his job.

Harrison has first-hand experience with such danger: He spent 18 months recovering from extensive injuries before he could return to work after being hit by a driver on April 4, 2006, while stopped with a motorist along Interstate 10 in Baton Rouge.

“I am just as worried about the dangers of working alongside of a road as being involved in a fight or shooting,” Harrison said.

Harrison, his colleagues at State Police and other law enforcement officers are strong supporters of Louisiana’s “move over” law. Under this law, a driver is required to move to the left lane if on a multi-lane road and slow down to a safe speed when he or she sees an officer or emergency vehicle stopped on the side of the road with emergency lights flashing. This law also protects the general public if their vehicles break down or if they stop to change flat tires since the law applies to any vehicle with its emergency lights flashing.

Lt. Col. John LeBlanc, executive director of the Louisiana Highway Safety Commission, said that traffic incidents nationwide killed more police officers than any other single cause. Between 1999 and 2008, 154 police officers were killed when struck by vehicles. LeBlanc explains there is limited space on road shoulders when an officer makes a traffic stop and exits his vehicle to speak with a driver.

“Motorists who don’t slow down and don’t move over leave only a few feet between their vehicles and public safety personnel or stranded motorists. That leaves very little room for error,” LeBlanc said. “All Louisiana drivers must be aware that, for the safety of themselves and others, it’s critical that they move over and slow down.”

“What happened to Trooper Harrison is a tragic situation that could have been avoided,” said Col. Michael Edmonson, Louisiana State Police superintendent. “Every year across the country, hundreds of people are injured or killed while standing along the shoulder of the highway. It is imperative that we keep our motorists and our public safety personnel safe by moving over.”

The driver who struck Harrison with his vehicle was impaired by drugs, making the situation even more dangerous. Harrison suffered multiple broken bones and ribs and a large wound to his head. The 26-year-old trooper continues to undergo surgeries, but is back on the job at Troop A in Baton Rouge. Harrison’s incident was captured by the camera mounted on the dashboard of his State Police vehicle and the video is currently being used in the training of troopers.

Trooper Harrison does not hesitate to warn drivers about what to do when they approach a stopped police car or emergency vehicle.

“Slow down and pay attention when approaching any vehicle on the shoulder with emergency flashers,” Harrison said. “We work within a few feet of high-speed traffic everyday. Move over to help us do our jobs safely.”

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