

Police test new high-tech tickets

By Lydia Seabol, Staff Writer

TUSCALOOSA | Tuscaloosa police officers can now issue traffic tickets with the click of a button.

With the help of new software technology developed by the University of Alabama, officers no longer have to stand on the roadside with pen and paper in hand. Now they can take a driver's license and scan it into a laptop computer in their vehicle.

The information from the license is automatically entered into the computer system, and the officer can then add any additional information and print a ticket for the driver.

Instead of having three copies of the paper citation -- one for the police officer, one for the driver and one for the courts -- the ticket is sent electronically to the Administrative Office of Courts in Montgomery. Court clerks don't have to enter the ticket information into the system, because it is already in the computer.

"It is a great time saver, is more efficient, more readable and has a lot more pros to it," Tuscaloosa Police Chief Ken Swindle said about the software.

The program was installed in four Tuscaloosa police vehicles in July, and then in six more vehicles in late August, said Brian Oswald, Tuscaloosa police investigator. So far, more than 600 tickets have been issued with the new system, which is being tested on a trial basis.

"We are experimenting to see if we like it," Oswald said. "So far, we've got positive feedback, especially from the officers who write the tickets. Everybody's been really impressed by it."

He said the program streamlines the process, so that instead of writing multiple tickets for multiple violations, officers can write one citation for several violations without typing in the information again.

Eventually the software will be installed in all of the Tuscaloosa police vehicles, Swindle said.

Developed in 2002, the E-Citation software was created by UA's CARE Research and Development Laboratory and funded by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. It was first tested by the Alabama Department of Transportation trucking weigh station in Heflin, then expanded to Baldwin, Cleburne, Madison and Mobile Counties.

The UA campus police are also testing the software, but on a smaller scale, said Allen Parrish, a computer science professor and director of CARE.

After the pilot program in Tuscaloosa is completed, it will gradually expand to other Alabama cities and state troopers.

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