

E-Citation saves time, paperwork

Tom Smith (Senior Staff Writer)

New technology is helping police enforce traffic laws.

"We've been implementing E-Citation for about three years," said Paul Mashburn, public information officer with the Quad-Cities State Trooper Post.

Mashburn said the E-Citation computer program was first tested by the troopers' motor carrier safety unit. The Alabama Department of Public Safety expanded the program's use to the highway patrol division.

"We currently have 168 of the E-Citation computers and software packages in operation," Mashburn said. "Another 295 are systematically being installed. Once those are all installed, everyone in the state's highway patrol division will have the E-Citation-capability."

In Alabama, the electronic ticketing system is implemented by the University of Alabama's CARE Research and Development Laboratory, which developed the program in 2003, according to a press release from the laboratory.

Mashburn said the system operates on laptop computers installed in the troopers' patrol cars. He said a trooper swipes the offending driver's license and all of the information needed for the ticket appears on the computer screen.

He said the tickets are electronically transmitted to the Administrative Office of Courts.

"It helps eliminate paperwork for the magistrates and court clerks," said Cpl. Glenn Taylor Jr., of the Quad-Cities post. He has used the system for more than a year. "I don't see a downside to this."

Taylor said if the laptop has a wireless card, the ticket information can be sent from the trooper car to the AOC.

"If they don't have the wireless cards, all (the troopers) have to do at the end of the shift is take the laptop out of the car, bring it into the post and put it into a docking station and send all the information," he said.

Not only does the system eliminate a lot of paperwork, it's also a time saver. "Which allows us more time to work traffic and prevent crashes," Taylor said.

Eddie Russell, director of the North Alabama Highway Safety Office in Tusculmbia, said his office secured a grant to place the system in a few cars for Florence and Huntsville police and the Madison County Sheriff's Office as part of a pilot program.

He said those departments were selected because they already had laptop computers in their patrol cars.

Florence police Deputy Chief Tony Logan said the system is in three of the department's patrol cars. He said offices like the simplicity of the system and the fact that it speeds the process of issuing a citation.

Rogersville police have received three computers through a grant and are waiting for the software.

"The average traffic stop, where a citation is issued, takes about five minutes," said Sgt. Patrick Minor. "With this system, that time will be cut to one to two minutes."

Russell said there are several departments in the area waiting for grants to implement the system.

"This is the future for law enforcement," Russell said. "It puts all the information right there (in front of the officer) at one time."

Russell said once the information is entered into the computer, a ticket is printed and given to the offender "and they're on their way. It's as simple as that."

Taylor said the system is also helpful when giving multiple-tickets.

"It has a replicate feature so when there are multiple citations, instead of handwriting each one, all you have to do is change a few things on the computer and all of the citations will be printed on one sheet," he said.

Another convenience of the system, Russell said, is the fact that so much information is readily available for the law enforcement officer with the swipe of the driver's license.

"The first time I used the system I was on a routine traffic stop," Taylor said. "When I checked the driver's license (of the offender), a warning popped up on the screen that the person had two prior arrests that involved a weapon and he could possibly be armed."

Officers say that kind of information can be a lifesaver.

Developers said the program minimizes errors on tickets, prevents incomplete tickets from being issued and produces useful statistical information.

"It's law enforcement catching up with technology," Taylor said.

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