

July 29, 2007

Escondido police chief addresses checkpoints and immigration

By: TERI FIGUEROA - Staff Writer

ESCONDIDO ---- Hit-and-run crashes are down 24 percent in Escondido since the city's Police Department began its controversial driver's license checkpoints program, the chief of police said Saturday.

The checkpoints ---- and the policy of impounding a driver's car if the driver doesn't have a license ---- have raised the ire of some people in the community. Many activists argue the checkpoints are a back door to checking immigration status, particularly for Latinos.

Addressing more than 40 members of the Escondido Democratic Club at the Escondido Public Library, Jim Maher said he has not kept statistics as to how many of the people found driving without a license in Escondido are in the country illegally.

The chief also said the city does not include Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials at the checkpoints.

Maher said the reason for the checkpoint program is the city's high number of hit-and-run crashes.

"We know that a lot of people leave the scene (of a hit and run) because they don't have a license, insurance, or have other problems," Maher said.

Maher, who declined media interviews, didn't discuss one of the more controversial pieces of departmental policy: the practice of impounding for 30 days the cars of anyone nabbed for driving without a license.

The practice has become a widespread concern among Latino rights activists, who say immigrants are targeted by the impound provisions. The policy is also the central issue of a federal lawsuit targeting Escondido and other cities and counties in California.

Illegal immigration has become a hot issue in Escondido over the last year, boiling over when the City Council passed ---- but dropped after hitting serious legal roadblocks ---- an ordinance to punish landlords who rent to illegal immigrants.

Some council members are now trying to pass an overnight parking ordinance that would restrict parking on residential streets to reduce overcrowding and improve the appearance of neighborhoods. Some council members blame the overcrowding in part on illegal immigrants.

In March, Maher told the council that a new Police Department policy has officers working more with federal immigration agents. That means doing background checks on suspects for a broader range of misdemeanor violations ---- which could lead to deportation for more illegal immigrants who commit crimes in Escondido.

Maher said Saturday that the checkpoints do not target Latino drivers.

All drivers at a checkpoint are stopped and asked to show their license ---- "We stop every single person," Maher said ---- until traffic backs up. Once that happens, he said, all drivers are waived through until traffic eases up.

Asked by someone in the audience if the Police Department honors driver's licenses from foreign countries, the chief said it is "much more difficult" to check the validity of licenses from Mexico, adding "that is something we are looking at."

"But the short answer is yes, we do accept Mexican driver's licenses," Maher said.

After the meeting, club member Evelyn Langston said the chief's speech cleared up her concerns about the checkpoints.

"I don't feel like they are profiling. I had questions about that before," the 58-year-old Escondido resident said.

Club member Rick Bova said he, too, encountered the unexpected from Maher.

"I didn't find anything to disagree with," Bova said. "I was most surprised by that. It seemed logical and correct."

Contact staff writer Teri Figueroa at (760) 631-6624 or tfigueroa@nctimes.com.

Comments On This Story

Note: Comments reflect the views of readers and not necessarily those of the North County Times or its staff.

not the truth wrote on Jul 28, 2007 11:49 PM:

" Escondido police officers are not honoring Mexican Licenses! "

Escondeeter wrote on Jul 29, 2007 12:14 AM:

" Only in a group of Democrats would you find people who were surprised that public safety officials operate in a logical and correct fashion. "

American Mike wrote on Jul 29, 2007 12:38 AM:

" "The practice has become a widespread concern among Latino rights activists, who say immigrants are targeted by the impound provisions." I don't get it. First being here illegally, and getting away with it isn't enough. Now it's Latinos are targeted because they don't have a valid driver's license and insurance? When will United States Citizens pull liberal judges from their seats, and replace them with back and white, down the middle judicial law enforcement? I wish to heck I didn't have to smog my vehicle, pay thousands of dollars in insurance and registrations, just to see a 70 Ford Pinto blowing a plume of black smoke out it's exhaust with a temporary red

sticker in the window that expired the previous month. When, in Gods name will liberal politicians (or citizens for that matter), and south of the border Latinos realize that the United States is NOT Mexico. There is an international border there people. It is meant to separate the United States from Mexico, both by law, and nationality. Kudos to the Escondido Police Departments efforts to keep ALL unlicensed and uninsured motorist off the roadways. "

International Driver's License wrote on Jul 29, 2007 1:43 AM:

" I get my International Driver's License BEFORE I travel abroad. However, illegal aliens cannot use an international driver's license because that have not been lawfully admitted into the US. "

76% Too High! wrote on Jul 29, 2007 1:48 AM:

" Too many hit and run drivers in Escondido! It is a shame that those who break the law by violating the border continue their criminal conduct. The 'back door' argue is a laugh. How many deportations have resulted from these checkpoints solely for driving without a license. I'll put my money on ZERO! "

Truth And Fables wrote on Jul 29, 2007 1:58 AM:

" How the West was won?!

www.nctimes.com/articles/2007/05/01/news/nation/13_06_494_30_07.txt "

IT IS THE STATE LAW ! wrote on Jul 29, 2007 2:12 AM:

" RE: departmental policy: the practice of impounding for 30 days >>>> On January 1, 1995, new laws were enacted relating to unlicensed drivers. These laws, California Vehicle Code (CVC) Sections 14602.6 and 14607.6 authorize tow enforcement agencies to tow and impound vehicles for 30 days when driven by unlicensed, suspended, or revoked drivers. There is a possibility that the vehicle could be forfeited (taken from you by the state) if you have a prior conviction for driving while unlicensed, or with a suspended or revoked license.
<http://www.chp.ca.gov/html/impound.html> "

Thanks again wrote on Jul 29, 2007 4:27 AM:

" to the Escondido Police Department in actually doing something to keep us safe on the roads. "

Fred H wrote on Jul 29, 2007 7:35 AM:

" Call it what you want, but this is a matter of law & order. Thank goodness we have competent and resourceful law enforcement professionals on our side! "

Juanita wrote on Jul 29, 2007 7:42 AM:

" Sheriff Joe Arpaio for Mayor! "

Concerned wrote on Jul 29, 2007 7:56 AM:

" There's a very simple way to avoid getting your car impounded if you don't have a license. Don't drive. "

Dennis wrote on Jul 29, 2007 8:03 AM:

" Looks like a good first step in slowing illegal alien immigration and the Federal has no say in the matter. Now if the check points were manned by officers capable of deporting illegal aliens

we might see some real results. "

Incredible wrote on Jul 29, 2007 8:34 AM:

" "The practice has become a widespread concern among Latino rights activists, who say immigrants are targeted by the impound provisions. (Not LEGAL immigrants, only licenseless ILLEGALS) The policy is also the central issue of a federal lawsuit targeting Escondido and other cities and counties in California." Enforcing the law has now become a Federal issue by Latino rights activists? What a surprise!!! "We advocate the lawlessness of ALL illegal immigrants!!! You don't like it? We'll SUE!!!" I can't believe any tax paying AMERICAN would agree with this anti American mentality. "

John wrote on Jul 29, 2007 8:35 AM:

" Honoring a VALID (date and address correct) , Mexican, Canadian or International License is OK. Its the lack of Insurance , lack of valid registration ,Regardless of country that's the problem. Along with forged documents . "

Carson wrote on Jul 29, 2007 8:42 AM:

" I hope they are working the NORTH BOUND lanes. "

Carson wrote on Jul 29, 2007 8:45 AM:

" Quote: "Hit-and-run crashes are down 24 percent in Escondido" Nuff said. Congratulations, Escondido Police! "

who's calling who what wrote on Jul 29, 2007 8:49 AM:

" Who are the real racist here??? Do we hear 'these advocates' ever say fair treatment for all, no only for special groups of people. NOW THATS A RACIST. The laws are on the books, enforce them, stop blaming others because you broke the law and got caught. We just need more checkpoints, let the chips fall where they may ! "

Hundreds of EPD supporters say THANKYOU!!! wrote on Jul 29, 2007 9:09 AM:

" Please continue the traffic safety check points! We want Escondido to become the safest town in the county, not the most dangerous. This article mentioned people complaining about the checkpoints, but did not mention the 500 plus SUPPORTERS that have signed letters of appreciation for the actions of the EPD. These signatures were collected by CERS, Citizens of Escondido for Road Safety, and have been delivered to City Hall, the NCT and the police department. "

Tony wrote on Jul 29, 2007 9:09 AM:

" Just another example of Illegal Aliens thinking they can break our laws and get away with it. No matter who it is, if they have no license - they get a ticket and their car should be impounded until the R/O WITH a license comes to pick it up. Too bad -so sad but tat's the Law. "

Reardon wrote on Jul 29, 2007 9:09 AM:

" I hope someone can help me. If "immigration" is solely a federal responsibility, and local police cannot be of help -- then why do local police assist in kidnapping cases and bank robbery cases which are primarily if not exclusively federal responsibility? "

Robert24 wrote on Jul 29, 2007 9:30 AM:

" Thank you, EPD! I have been through several of these stops, and I am happy and proud to show my current registration, my legal Driver's License, and my proof of insurance. Why wouldn't I be? Why would I think anybody else shouldn't as well? I guess as much as a drunk driver hates sobriety checkpoints, so do the illegal drivers who fail to maintain insurance, current registration or a legal, valid Driver's License. No matter who you are, if you try and get away with something, sooner or later you will get caught. Thank you again, EPD! Keep up the great work! "

gonzalez wrote on Jul 29, 2007 9:36 AM:

" EPD good job. that its all you need to do to regaing the city of escondido keep doing what you are doing for six monts and moss of the ilegals will be gone ..oh..I AM MEXICAN NATIONALITY..BUT NOW A U S CITIZEN.. "

Thank you Escondido Police wrote on Jul 29, 2007 9:51 AM:

" for doing your job so well! We want MORE check points. And to you Latino Activists I say How can you as Americans defend the criminal activities of the ILLEGAL aliens? I think you are not Americans in your heart and maybe should move to Mexico, Guatamala, Panama or some other country south of here. "

Hadenuff in Escondido wrote on Jul 29, 2007 10:16 AM:

" GO EPD!!! These liberal kooks who are trying to eliminate law and order in the United States have to be stopped. "

Ken wrote on Jul 29, 2007 10:21 AM:

" Great work Escondido Police Department! You need to keep it up until you finally get rid of those that are breaking our laws by driving without a license, without insurance, without registration, etc. BUT, why are you accepting a Mexican drivers license? If it was an International drivers license, then that would be acceptable. If you are in this country, you have NO RIGHTS! If you are an illegal alien, then return to you own home country and drive all you want there. "

Tony wrote on Jul 29, 2007 10:28 AM:

" Just what we need. More illegal aliens who can't read or write English and therefore can't read the street and directional signs, driving without a license, without registration and without insurance. I hope they crash into Bill Flores and his buddies from El Grupo... You can bet ol Bill will be jumping up and donw when his car is damaged and his family memebtrs injured or killed! Good Job Chief. Keep it up. Driving is a PRIVILEGE! Not a right! "

EthnicStudent wrote on Jul 29, 2007 10:31 AM:

" Thank you Escondido PD! "

Daver R wrote on Jul 29, 2007 10:36 AM:

" Great work Escondido PD. The law is clear - You drive without a license your car gets impounded. The rest of the county needs to get in gear and follow Escondido program. "

gofer wrote on Jul 29, 2007 11:10 AM:

" I'm proud of the Escondido Police. Americans support law and order which distinguishes us from the anarchy found in other countries, where laws are only an obstacle to be overcome! KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK! "

Police Officer wrote on Jul 29, 2007 11:11 AM:

" I've encountered hundreds of Mexican drivers. For those who have presented a Mexican "Driver License," I would bet that less than ten had actual VALID drivers licenses. I've been trained by CHP border division officers to recognize fake licenses from Mexico and, unscientifically believe, that 99.9% of Mexican licenses that are presented, are FAKE!! The result is a formerly unlicensed driver who makes the transition to pedestrian via a 30 day impound. "

Larry wrote on Jul 29, 2007 11:17 AM:

" It is a bit worrisome that a group of Socialists found the Chief of Police so much to their liking – they aren't known for supporting law and order. It did help with the crowd that the Chief said he was formally a Republican. He also said he couldn't speak freely because there were Republicans in the audience and a camera crew present. Here is a bit more flavor from the meeting: After the Chief spoke there was another individual selling impeach Bush and Chaney bumper stickers. There was another who said that President Bush's amnesty program for illegal aliens was only established to get Central American's for the U.S. Military. "

Skip wrote on Jul 29, 2007 11:45 AM:

" It's hard to imagine, knowing the feelings of this Nation, Democrats openly defying the American people. It seems we, the citizens, are not to be pandered to, only foreign nationals. The democrat party has been hijacked by far-leftwingers and considering most Americans are slightly right of center are they deluded? I know a lot of Democrats who have left the party solely because of the immigration issue. One Democrat man said all the democrats he knew were against illegals and wanted the laws enforced. The "blue dog" Dems need to take back their party! "

El Jefe wrote on Jul 29, 2007 11:47 AM:

" We finally have laws on the books that help us in reducing the number of unlicensed & uninsured drivers & now the lawbreakers are crying foul! Unlicensed, undocumented, drivers often buy used vehicles from a private party & don't bother to transfer title until the sticker nears expiration. This is the biggest problem for the unlicensed because they are required to prove to the tow yard they own the vehicle & are legally licensed & insured to obtain release of "their" vehicles. I know. because these unlicensed, undocumented, folk come to my office every day asking me to help them recover their vehicles only to discover they never bothered to register them in their own name in the first place. Also, under current law a car dealer is supposed to be provided proof of insurance by the buyer before allowing a vehicle off the dealer lot. Just drive up & down Escondido Blvd & see the scrap iron lots of used car dealers with signs in Spanish advertising how easy it is to get a car without prior credit history & in many cases even a California driver license or proof of insurance. Often these dealers get enough of a down payment on these old cars to have very little risk in financing the "balance" (their potential profit) themselves. At the 20% plus interest rates they charge they're making a nice markup &

cannot afford to stop. Also, the sub-prime loan market is to blame for the ease in which the undocumented, unlicensed, unqualified borrowers can finance a vehicle. A lot of this could be prevented if our laws were more strictly enforced at the point of sale. Lastly, let's not forget that the police don't just rely on roadblocks since police cars are now equipped with newer more sophisticated software instantly connecting them to the DMV database which tells them if a particular vehicle is insured or not. The insurance companies I represent are required by law to immediately notify the DMV when someone fails to continue carrying at least the minimum Financial Responsibility Limits required in California. If you are a law abiding, insurance buying citizen just look at the premium your paying for uninsured motorist coverage & tell yourself your not subsidizing the uninsured driver in California. "

CALIFORNIA DMV WEBPAGE wrote on Jul 29, 2007 11:50 AM:

" It is interesting to note that on the California DMV webpage, that Drivers handbooks are available in "FOREIGN" Languages. "California Driver Handbook foreign language editions (PDF) Armenian , Chinese , Korean , Punjabi , Russian , Spanish , Tagalog , and Vietnamese . WOW, not that is the most politically Incorrect statement on a government webpage that I have seen in a long time. Or maybe it is not. Try telling some people that "Spanish" is a foreign language and you will immediately be called a racist. As much as I look, I can still not find the statement that "DRIVING IS A PRIVILEGE AND NOT A RIGHT".
http://www.dmv.ca.gov/dl/dl_pubs.htm "

devastated wrote on Jul 29, 2007 11:53 AM:

" perhaps if the unlicensed, illegal alien that killed my husband in a hit and run had his SUV impounded the first time he was stopped and ticketed for driving without a license, my husband would still be here. "

Non-Licensed Drivers... wrote on Jul 29, 2007 12:04 PM:

" Getting Their Cars Impounded? What's Wrong with That? It's a CRIME Just Like Being Illegally in the United States is a CRIME! "

proud liberal, former Democrat wrote on Jul 29, 2007 12:05 PM:

" I'm curious to know the percentage of vehicle impounds involving illegal aliens, but understand the reason for not keeping such statistics. It's too bad that so many see this as targeting Hispanic drivers; but then, there are just too many people who are hyper-vigilant, always looking for any excuse to feel insulted. The careless (unlicensed) idiot driver who crashed his (uninsured) vehicle into mine and then left the scene was a locally grown U.S. citizen, but his nationality/citizenship are irrelevant to the damage he caused. Anything the local EPD can do to reduce such accidents is fine with me -- exactly what we've hired them to do. I only wish the impounds were permanent, and not just for 30 days. "

Pedro G wrote on Jul 29, 2007 12:26 PM:

" If you don't have a license, drive a cheaper car. Then it won't matter as much if it's impounded. Tail lights? Brakes? Smog? Not so important. Better yet, how about a stolen car? Then we can laugh at the rightful owner when it's impounded just like we laugh at all the gringos when we crash into them and walk away because we don't have insurance or ID. "

avenger wrote on Jul 29, 2007 12:27 PM:

" Once again we see the inability of those that came here illegally to accept the consequences of their actions. If they don't want their vehicles impounded DON'T DRIVE WITHOUT A LICENSE! How hard is that to understand? I know this is usually followed by a "But we can't get a license because we are illegal and we have to drive to get to our job that Americans don't want because they pay so little!" I answer this with, "Consequences, this is the result of doing something illegal. Its just like telling a lie. One lie perpetuates another and so on. Illegal activity perpetuates more illegal activity and so on." So the answer is if you don't want to suffer the consequences don't do it! "

ILLEGAL ENTRY JUST ONE OF MANY CRIMES wrote on Jul 29, 2007 12:30 PM:

" http://www.nctimes.com/articles/2007/07/15/opinion/commentary/20_19_267_14_07.txt "

REMEMBER Mr. Gaspar Diego Gonzalez wrote on Jul 29, 2007 12:34 PM:

" http://www.nctimes.com/articles/2006/12/16/news/inland/escondido/21_53_1012_15_06.txt "

REMEMBER Mr. Thomas Icenogle wrote on Jul 29, 2007 12:35 PM:

" http://www.nctimes.com/articles/2007/04/16/news/inland/19_55_234_15_07.txt "

REMEMBER Ms Amy Kortlang wrote on Jul 29, 2007 12:37 PM:

" http://www.nctimes.com/articles/2006/12/14/news/sandiego/12_20_8012_13_06.txt "

REMEMBER Mr. Inez Salazar wrote on Jul 29, 2007 12:45 PM:

" <http://www.nctimes.com/articles/2006/10/30/news/inland/escondido/102906193405.txt> "

REMEMBER Mr. Eleuterio Balderas Linares wrote on Jul 29, 2007 12:47 PM:

" <http://www.nctimes.com/articles/2007/01/22/news/breaking/1220770919.txt> "

WHERE IS IT GOING TO END????????????? wrote on Jul 29, 2007 12:52 PM:

" The illegals and their unAMERICAN supporters want to change the U.S. to suit themselves. "

Witnessed a hit and run! wrote on Jul 29, 2007 1:01 PM:

" I was driving with my wife and daughter when a car ran a red light and hit another here in PQ. Well, guess what. The criminal illegal alien jumped out of the car and ran off. Imagine that! Thankfully an off duty Border Patrol agent also witnessed the event and got involved. He chased the creep down and called in SDPD. Thank you to all the law officers! If a legal citizen did something like that, they would face very tough repercussions;however, the illegal just gets a ride to the border only to sneak back in to purchase another junker and do the same thing again. I applaud the EPD for taking "ALL" unlicensed and uninsured drivers off the road. Amazing how when anything adversely affects the illegals, someone always steps in and screams of profiling, etc. Remember, they are here ILLEGALLY and are breaking many of our laws! OOPS, I forgot. Laws don't apply to them! "

These checkpoints target "law breakers", not Latinos! wrote on Jul 29, 2007 1:02 PM:

" The "sub-headline" was interesting, and it doesn't appear in this web edition but is in the printed newspaper.... It says, "Some say driver's license inspections target Latinos". The article

doesn't say who says it targets Latinos and there's only one sentence about this in the entire article. So how does this tidbit merit being in the headline??? The point is that the checkpoints target LAW BREAKERS, just as the ICE immigration enforcers target LAW BREAKERS. If most of the LAW BREAKERS happen to be Latino, then so be it. I'm tired of everyone trying to be so politically correct. If most of the lawbreakers happen to be Latinos, then the Latinos should speak up and tell the law breakers to keep the laws of the country where they reside. You can't call an apple an orange just because you don't like the fact that it's an apple. Duh! "

Patrol car hit by DUI suspect, none hurt wrote on Jul 29, 2007 1:19 PM:

" DOES ANYONE THINK THAT THIS GUY HAD A DRIVER'S LICENSE?

http://www.nctimes.com/articles/2007/07/10/news/inland/san_marcos/19_05_477_9_07.txt "

Juanita to Where is it going to End... wrote on Jul 29, 2007 1:37 PM:

" It starts at the top. Find a presidential candidate for '08 and VOTE. There is only ONE (that I know of) who promises to STOP NAFTA. Get involved! "

RG wrote on Jul 29, 2007 1:57 PM:

" I think most of us are really getting tired of these "activists" whining about how Latinos are being unfairly singled out. We know very well that a large number of the problems are caused by illegals and the Mexican culture of "run from the scene of a crime". It's too easy for these people to simply disappear back to the other side of the border until their problem goes away. A simple google search of the San Diego County Sheriff web site shows that 80 % of the 10 most wanted fugitives are Latino. These Latino activists complain whenever something is done to enforce our laws. Sadly pathetic. "

to not the truth wrote on Jul 29, 2007 2:13 PM:

" Escondido PD does not have to honor Mexican liscenses. Just like they don't have to honor any other country's . There is an internatonal license that people can get. OR get a california's license. For the love of God, I pay enough in taxes so the DMV can print the driving laws in spanish. Oh by the way, good luck getting a county or state job if you DON'T speak spanish. How stupid is that. "

Skip wrote on Jul 29, 2007 2:59 PM:

" One reason you do not hear about all of the Hit-and-run crashes in Escondido is because many of the victims are themselves Illegal Aliens. Even when one man was killed in Escondido last year, and he was the father of six, there was very little public outcry, because he himself may have been an illegal alien. "

John wrote on Jul 29, 2007 3:04 PM:

" I was a very close friend of Mr. Icenogle, and I can't tell you how saddened I am by this. There are so many people driving in N. County that do not have licenses, insurance, training, or common sense, and this is the result. I can't blame the police, they are doing all they can to catch these drivers, and Tom was taking his chances riding a motorcycle on the streets, but nevertheless, his family and friends have lost a truly great person, and he will be sorely missed. Tom, you will live forever in my heart. John "

Tell The Whole Story!!!!!! wrote on Jul 29, 2007 3:06 PM:

" IF Hit-and-run crashes are down 24 percent in Escondido, THEN HOW MANY DID THEY HAVE IN THE LAST YEAR? "

Local wrote on Jul 29, 2007 3:14 PM:

" Please, will someone take these activists (what country do they live in?) and get some laws that will once in for all end this protection of people that break the law or are here illegally!!! I don't care what race they are or where they come from. Driving without a license or insurance is bad enough...then fleeing the scene of an accident because they are here illegally, have no license or insurance needs to have serious penalties!! I hope that the judge reviewing the issue does the right thing. End the protection!!!! "

DRIVER'S LICENSE INSPECTIONS TARGET LATINOS wrote on Jul 29, 2007 3:23 PM:

" With so many cars having ILLEGAL WINDOW TINTING on the front windows and windshield these days, how can the Police possibly tell what the race of the people driving the cars is? "