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TRAFFIC COPS IN PERIL ON THE ROAD
GEORGIA MOTORISTS FACE \$500 MOVE-OVER LAW FINES
"SLOW DOWN. CHANGE LANES. SAVE LIVES"

(ATLANTA) Think police work is dangerous? According to FBI reports, traffic enforcement units face some of the greatest risks on the road. In 2008 crashes and traffic-related incidents either equaled or exceeded officers under fire as the leading cause of police deaths in this country...for the twelfth consecutive year.

"Failure for drivers to simply move-over a lane can have killer consequences for our hometown police officers working alongside our highways," said Director Bob Dallas of the Governor's Office of Highway Safety (GOHS). Nationwide, incident reports show law enforcement and emergency vehicles of all types are struck while working beside a highway...even while red, yellow, blue or white emergency lights are flashing.

"Let's face it," said GOHS Director Dallas. "Put a steering wheel in the wrong hands and a motor vehicle becomes a multi-ton killing machine. And although no criminal intent may be involved, when an officer dies because a careless motorist points a car in the wrong direction, that officer is just as dead as when a felon points a gun and pulls a trigger. That's exactly why we have the **Move Over Law** here in Georgia."

Georgia's **Move Over Law** is a proven lifesaver, it's common sense, and it has only two simple steps to remember:

1. Like the name says, it **requires drivers to move-over one lane if possible** whenever an emergency vehicle of *any* kind is working on the side of the road displaying flashing blue, red, yellow or white emergency lights..
2. And what if traffic is too congested to move-over safely? The **Move-Over Law** says if there's no room to move over, **drivers must slow down, below the posted speed limit and be prepared to stop.**

Police have been enforcing this lifesaving law in Georgia since 2003...And now, wherever you drive across the country in 2009, forty-two other states have laws like it. While the nation got around to adopting **Move-Over Laws**, more than 169 law enforcement officers have been struck and killed by vehicles along America's highways since 1997. Those twelve tragic years demonstrate that each time an officer makes a traffic stop, it's one of the gravest dangers police can face on the road today.

Just last October in Georgia, Oconee County Deputy David Gilstrap was struck and killed outside his patrol car in what investigators have ruled a **Move Over Law** violation. Deputy Gilstrap was wearing a reflective vest and directing traffic with two bright orange cone flashlights outside a primary school at 7:25 AM when he was struck by a motorist inside the school zone.

"It's one of the greatest perils of wearing a uniform," said Director Dallas. "Our officers observe careless driving nearly every time they make a traffic stop or motorist assist. Anyone who works our roadways is at risk, but our traffic enforcement details are in constant danger."

And it isn't just about saving the lives of police officers, deputies and state troopers," said Director Dallas. "The law also applies to emergency vehicles operated by our firefighters, paramedics, DOT maintenance and construction crews, and wrecker drivers. These dedicated professionals put their lives on the line every day to make sure our roads are safe for our families to travel," Dallas said. "Now with the economic stimulus funds being used to improve our nation's roadways, we can expect even more construction crews out working for us and they're vulnerable."

The **Move-Over Law** was passed here after Georgia road crews, traffic enforcement officers, and other first responders endured needless years of roadside deaths and injuries due to careless errors made by distracted drivers as they sped by police making traffic stops and emergency crews working roadside jobsites.

"So the **Move-Over Law** is another good reason to slow down on Georgia's interstates and rural roads," said Director Dallas. "When a motorist makes the required clearance for a roadside emergency vehicle the margin of safety increases not only for public safety and emergency personnel, but for passing motorists and their passengers as well. Observing the **Move-Over Law** is vital because motorists like you and me are often crash victims as well," said Dallas.

Nationally, a thousand motorists are killed every year in work zone crashes and another 40-thousand passenger vehicle occupants are seriously injured. Startling Georgia DOT stats show three-out-of-four work zone fatalities are actually motorists or their passengers, *not* highway work crews. Now drivers caught speeding or driving recklessly in a Georgia work zone can expect fines up to \$2,000.

"Unfortunately, violations of Georgia's **Move-Over Law** are still far too common and police still experience too many close calls with too many aggressive drivers," said Director Dallas. To reduce the deadly potential for Georgia law enforcement fatalities, legislators here allow local judges to set **Move-Over Law** violation fines as high as five-hundred-dollars to help modify careless driver behavior. Penalties in other states range as high as a thousand dollars and more states are considering "**Move Over**" legislation like Georgia's.

But the odds still target police on patrol. The 2008 National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (NLEOMF) "Fallen Heroes Report" shows eighteen officers died during their daily traffic enforcement duties last year across this country. "Agency figures can't begin to keep up with the countless cops who suffer injuries from passing motorists and the near misses never make it into annual reports," said Director Dallas.

As a result, many Georgia police agencies now routinely designate traffic enforcement units to work in pairs during daily patrols. While one officer is working traffic enforcement, a second officer cites drivers who fail to ***move-over or slow down***. This pro-active method of **Move-Over Law** enforcement is resulting in more citations and more news coverage about Georgia's lifesaving statute throughout the state.

Both the Georgia DOT and many municipalities have posted warning signs throughout the State. A five-hundred-dollar-fine for the first offense is a costly reminder, but as more local police departments deploy these high-visibility enforcement measures, all anyone has to do to avoid the **Move Over Law** fine is use this common sense precaution behind the wheel: "***Slow Down. Change Lanes. Save Lives.***" Read the full text of Georgia's **Move Over Law** on our website at www.gahighwaysafety.org. For more information on the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund studies, visit www.nleomf.com.