

DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY

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Dave Mitchell, Commissioner

Mission Statement

Through education, regulation, and enforcement, we ensure the overall safety and welfare of the public.

History

The department's beginnings were in 1929, when Governor Henry Horton signed a law creating the Tennessee Highway Patrol, patterned after the historic Texas Rangers. The department was formally established by the General Assembly in 1939. Today, more than 900 State Troopers are responsible for safety on over 14,000 miles of state and federal highways.

In 1937, Tennessee became the 32nd state to enact a Driver License Law. During the first year, 521,571 licenses were issued. Today, the number of licensed drivers in Tennessee is over 4.4 million.

Services

The Department of Safety's areas of responsibility include driver license issuance, homeland security and law enforcement. In carrying out its mission, the department has an impact on virtually every person in the state. But its responsibilities extend into other areas as well. Department of Safety employees also work to inspect public school buses, investigate auto theft, issue handgun permits, enforce commercial vehicle safety and inspection laws, and promote safe driving practices to groups across the state.

The department is comprised of a highly professional staff of more than 1,700 employees. Headquartered in Nashville, the Department of Safety maintains a strong presence statewide with employees assigned to each of the state's 95 counties. Approximately half of the department consists of commissioned law enforcement officers, while the rest are civilian employees.

The department's numerous responsibilities include:

Driver License Issuance. The primary focus of this division is to issue driver licenses and identification cards to qualified applicants, but services have broadened to include additional customer conveniences such as voter registration applications, issuance of driving records, processing of handgun carry permit applications and license reinstatement services. The division also issues Commercial Driver Licenses (CDL) as part of a federal program requiring a standardized test for commercial drivers.

The division maintains and staffs 52 Driver Services Centers across the state and has contracts with 35 county clerk locations to provide express duplicate and renewal services via each clerk's staff at their offices. The division has expanded

self-service options for the public by providing duplicate and renewal services via the state's Internet system and by placing self-service kiosks in all of its Driver Services Centers. Through these combined service outlets, the division completed an average of 1.5 million transactions annually between July 1, 2001 and June 30, 2008.

Commercial Driver License Issuance Unit. The Commercial Driver License Issuance Unit oversees and monitors commercial driver license testing, as well as the Cooperative Driver Testing Program for teens and adults who wish to obtain a regular operator's license. The CDL Unit also trains state examiners and third-party personnel to administer these tests.

This unit also oversees the processing requirements for the Patriot Act as it applies to the Hazardous Materials Endorsement. Data is collected and keyed in, and customers are assisted on a daily basis.

Financial Responsibility Division. This division administers the Financial Responsibility Law by coordinating all driver license cancellations, revocations and suspensions of driving privileges arising from crashes, moving traffic convictions, truancy, the Drug-Free Youth Act, alcohol violations, weapons, child support, uninsured violations and failure to appear in court. The division maintains information on out-of-state traffic violations by Tennessee licensed drivers, as well as offenses committed in this state, and is responsible for reinstatements of cancelled, suspended and revoked driver licenses.

Tennessee Office of Homeland Security. Governor Phil Bredesen merged Tennessee's Office of Homeland Security with the Department of Safety in 2007 to enhance the mutual support the agencies provide each other. The office has primary responsibility and authority for coordinating and directing the state's homeland security activities. Functions include, but are not limited to, planning, coordination and implementation of all homeland security prevention, detection, protection and terrorism-response operations. The office coordinates with agencies throughout the state and with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in Washington, D.C. It works hand in hand with Tennessee's three FBI Joint Terrorism Task Forces.

The Tennessee Office of Homeland Security is made up of the Director's Office, the BWXT Y-12 Liaison, a Law Enforcement Investigation Support Division, the Tennessee Intelligence Fusion Center, a Volunteer Programs and Citizen Outreach Division, a Plans and Technology Division, a Critical Infrastructure Division and an Exercise and Continuing Education Division. In addition, the Office of Homeland Security oversees three regional offices in West, Middle and East Tennessee.

Homeland Security Council. Policy and apportioning of homeland security funding is coordinated through the Homeland Security Council, an organization composed of leadership from key departments, agencies and selected local jurisdictions responsible for a coordinated homeland security effort. The Homeland Security Council ensures the Governor's vision and guiding principles are maintained and implemented through oversight of the state's counterterrorism strategy.

Legal Division. The Legal Division serves in an advisory capacity to all other divisions of the department. Attorneys work with the Attorney General's Office in all appealed asset forfeiture cases and any claims cases that are filed against the department or its employees. In addition, this division prepares, tracks and advises the Commissioner on any legislation relative to the department, and the General Counsel serves as the Legislative Liaison.

With an office in each of the three grand divisions, the Legal Division also administers asset forfeiture laws, manages all aspects of asset forfeiture cases and represents law enforcement agencies that seize property. The staff is responsible for processing, setting and the final disposition of all administrative hearings relative to seizures arising from the Tennessee Drug Control Act, second time DUI, Driving on Revoked and Auto Theft. These hearings are currently held in Nashville, Memphis, Knoxville and Chattanooga, as well as other parts of the state. To enhance this service, the Legal Division also provides training to law enforcement officers in this area of the law. This enables them to prepare better cases and strengthens the division's ability to represent them.

During the 2007-2008 fiscal year, the Legal Division opened 10,249 cases and closed 10,168 cases.

Tennessee Highway Patrol (THP). The Tennessee Highway Patrol has served the state for more than 80 years. Today's Trooper is highly trained and skilled in all aspects of law enforcement, including traffic crash investigation, criminal interdiction, dignitary protection and enforcement of state and federal traffic laws and regulations. THP has gained certification from the Commission on the Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA), a prestigious, international law enforcement certification body.

In 2008, the THP's management structure was reorganized to provide better oversight of commissioned programs and activities. The Colonel is the head of the division. He is assisted by two Lieutenant Colonels, one for the Field Operations Bureau and one for the Support Services Bureau, and a Major who functions as an executive officer. The Lieutenant Colonels are assisted by three Majors. This structure provides a professional system of checks and balances throughout the chain of command.

The Tennessee Highway Patrol's primary responsibility is traffic enforcement. In 2008, Troopers assisted 43,639 motorists and wrote more than 352,258 citations in an effort to keep the highways safe.

Motorists can use the *THP (*847) system, which enables cell phone users to contact Highway Patrol dispatchers in emergency situations. Additionally, the THP investigates traffic crashes and vehicular homicides and assists other law enforcement agencies.

Professional Standards Bureau. The primary mission of the Professional Standards Bureau is to assure that employees of the department meet the highest standards of professionalism, integrity and ethical performance. Two work units share this task. The Office of Professional Responsibility manages the investigative and disciplinary processes for the department. The Staff Inspections Unit conducts inspections of all organizational components within the department, and ensures compliance with national accreditation standards and departmental policies and procedures.

Special Operations. Special Operations consists of four specialized units: Aviation Section, Tactical Squad, Canine Unit and the Governor's Task Force on Marijuana Eradication.

Aviation. The Aviation Section is responsible for all air support and related responsibilities for the Tennessee Highway Patrol and other agencies. It utilizes four Jet Ranger helicopters and one Huey UH-1H helicopter in searches, rescues, speed enforcement, location of stolen vehicles and marijuana searches.

Tactical Squad. This team of specially equipped Troopers provides security for dignitaries and responds to prison riots, high-risk arrests, hostage situations and other incidents requiring the use of tear gas and high-powered and automatic

weapons. It also handles bombs, destroys unstable explosives and maintains a team of scuba divers who can search for stolen vehicles and victims of crimes and drowning.

Canine Unit. This unit consists of 40 dogs—one patrol dog, one tracking dog, 11 explosives detector dogs, and 22 drug detector dogs, as well as four cross-trained drug detector/patrol dogs and one explosive detector/patrol dog. The canines work within the eight Tennessee Highway Patrol districts.

Governor's Task Force on Marijuana Eradication. Special Operations works in conjunction with the Alcoholic Beverage Commission, Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee National Guard and Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency on marijuana eradication. During the 2007-2008 fiscal year, more than a half-million marijuana plants were destroyed in the state.

Capitol Security. These Troopers are responsible for security, as well as enforcement of parking regulations, at the State Capitol, Legislative Plaza, Supreme Court, War Memorial Building, Department of Safety Headquarters and other state properties in Davidson County.

Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT). This unit's primary responsibility is to investigate and/or reconstruct serious motor vehicle traffic crashes. Unit members also assist local, state and federal law enforcement agencies, as well as investigate all criminal homicides worked by the Highway Patrol.

Criminal Investigation Division (CID). The CID unit investigates crimes such as vehicle theft, odometer tampering, driver license fraud and vehicular homicide. It also assists the Professional Standards Bureau and conducts investigations as requested by the director of the TBI and approved by the Commissioner of Safety.

Commercial Vehicle Enforcement. This division works to ensure the safe and legal operation of commercial vehicles and school buses in Tennessee. It includes two sections: Enforcement and School Bus Driver Transportation and Safety Inspection. Since 2004, all Troopers have been trained in laws pertaining to commercial vehicles, as well as traditional law enforcement duties. Troopers perform safety and weight inspections of commercial vehicles and are involved in educating the public and the trucking industry through specialized programs.

The Tennessee Highway Patrol has established a New Entrant Program for trucking firms. Under this program, State Troopers conduct safety audits on companies entering the transportation industry, to ensure their compliance with Federal Motor Carrier Safety rules and regulations.

The Alternative Commercial Enforcement Strategies Program was formed to educate safety directors, maintenance professionals and drivers in the necessary compliance with laws and regulations. And the "NO-ZONE" and "Share the Road" programs are designed to educate the motoring public about how to drive safely on the highways with big trucks. These programs are presented for civic groups and school systems to help drivers understand truckers' blind spots, stopping distances and maneuverability.

School Bus Driver Transportation and Safety Inspection Section. During the 2007-2008 fiscal year this section performed more than 10,000 safety inspections on school buses and child care vans. Personnel also conducted mandatory training and testing for approximately 11,450 school bus drivers and 1,210 child care van drivers each year.

Handgun Permit Unit. This section issues handgun carry permits, oversees and monitors the application process and coordinates with the Handgun Safety School program. Both programs are governed by state law, rules and policy.

Commissioner Dave Mitchell

Tennessee Department of Safety

Dave Mitchell was named Commissioner of the Department of Safety by Governor Phil Bredesen in January 2007. At the same time, the Governor also announced intentions to merge Safety with the Governor's Office of Homeland Security. Mitchell has served as Director of Homeland Security since November 2005. In that role, he has prioritized information sharing by establishing a State Fusion Center in partnership with the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI), and by expanding the state's counterterrorism training program. Mitchell began his law enforcement career as a patrol officer with the Murfreesboro, Tenn., Police Department after his graduation from Middle Tennessee State University in 1973, where he earned a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science. He also served as an instructor at the Tennessee Law Enforcement Training Academy in Nashville and as a deputy sheriff with the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office in Tampa, Fla. In May 1978, Mitchell began a 26-year career with the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

He served in the New Orleans, New York City, Atlanta and Milwaukee field offices. He also served at FBI Headquarters in Washington, D.C., as Supervisor of Domestic Terrorism Investigations in 1987, and in 1998 as an Inspector. Mitchell was a member of the nation's first Joint Terrorism Task Force in New York City, where FBI agents, New York City detectives and a number of federal and state agencies successfully dismantled several violent domestic terrorist organizations. In February 2002, FBI Director Robert Mueller promoted Mitchell to the position of Special Agent in Charge of the Milwaukee, Wis., field office. In May 2003, Director Mueller deployed Mitchell to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, as the on scene commander to lead the investigation of al-Qaeda bombings at three western compounds where eight Americans were killed. During this investigation, Mitchell worked closely with Saudi security forces, and British and Canadian counterterrorism authorities. Mitchell has investigated and managed major terrorism and criminal enterprise investigations. He promotes partnerships at all levels of law enforcement and believes the success to preventing future acts of terrorism is dependent on effective information sharing, training and cooperative partnerships among federal, state and local agencies. Mitchell resides in Franklin, Tenn., with his wife, Rosie. He has two children and five grandchildren.

