

Watch your speed (and cellphone usage): Alton Police upping traffic enforcement

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ALTON - The Holiday Season brings more people to Alton than usual, and not everybody knows the subtle nuances of "slow down before State Street's hill," and "school zone: speed limit 20."

Because of that, Alton Police Chief Jason "Jake" Simmons said his officers are focusing more on traffic enforcement - especially in areas notorious for speeding and accidents, and school zones. Among those enforcement areas are school zones, such as State

Street, Washington Avenue and College Avenue. Simmons said his officers are posted there during times students are entering and leaving school to watch for both speeders and drivers illegally using cellphones. Simmons said he did not call such enforcement zones "speed traps," adding they are more aimed at protecting kids and motorists than catching speeders.

"We do write a few tickets every day, but officers are also issuing verbal warnings at their discretion," Simmons said. "Given it's the Holiday Season, a lot of people are visiting Alton who may not know their ways around town.

"The speed limits are 30, and they're supposed to be 20 in the school zone while school is in session," Simmons added. "So, if you're going 40, and an officer is running radar, you're going to get pulled over. We're out there every morning and afternoon, because the safety of students is paramount to us."

School zones are not the only places traffic enforcement officers are being stationed. Besides the safety of students, Simmons said he looks at accident hot spots and listens to complaints from local residents and business owners. The amount of accidents in a small area is another reason Simmons said officers are hitting State Street harder with traffic enforcement.

One of the worst places for accidents in Alton, the Clark Bridge, is also being patrolled, Simmons said. He said he has heightened officer presence there for that reason. Drivers on or near the bridge should also expect more officers in the coming days or weeks in an effort to slow people down for the work on the upcoming (and controversial) license-plate-reading (LPR) cameras.

The LPR cameras of which 59.88 percent of poll-takers on Riverbender.com said they are in favor, will be installed either this week or just after Christmas, Simmons said. The installation process may take as long as two days, and Simmons said his officers will be working to slow speeders on or near the bridge, especially during that process. Those cameras will not and cannot be used to enforce traffic laws, however, as Simmons has said repeatedly on record.