

Help! I got a traffic ticket. What do I do?

By David Rosenberg | Special to The Enterprise | November 13, 2009 18:06



Getting pulled over by a law enforcement officer for a traffic violation is but the first step of many through what might seem like a cumbersome judicial process. The Yolo Superior Court makes the process easier to understand with this primer on what to do after you receive a ticket. (Big Stock Photo/Courtesy photo)

The Yolo Superior Court processes tens of thousands of traffic tickets every year written by local police departments and sheriff's deputies. In our continuing effort to demystify the process and make it more understandable to the public, we issue this primer called: Help! I got a traffic ticket! What do I do?

First, look on your ticket and note the court date written by the citing officer. This date is important, because you will have to make certain choices before this date. You should receive a courtesy notice from the court within two weeks of receiving your citation, which tells you the required bail amount and court date, as well as options for payment and trials. If you do not receive this notice, you should call the court for the information on your case.

Do I have to show up at the court date? In most cases, a court appearance is not required, but you must clear the ticket by

paying the bail amount in full or choose one of the other options on your courtesy notice before the court date.

If you choose not to pay the bail amount, you must appear at the date and time indicated on the ticket and your notice. If you do not appear in court or pay the bail amount by the court date, you may be charged with a failure to appear. A penalty of \$300 may be imposed and a hold may be placed on your driver's license.

How do I find out what the bail amount is? Your bail amount will be on your courtesy notice unless your violation requires a mandatory appearance. Also, the violations that you are charged with are written on the ticket by the citing officer. The bail schedule, which is posted on the court's Web site - <http://www.yolo.courts.ca.gov> - will show you the amount due for each charge. There are additional fees on top of the fines that you will be required to pay. You can also call the Yolo Superior Court Traffic Division at (530) 406-6702 and speak with a clerk.

How do I pay the bail? Payment of the required bail can be made several ways. To pay in person, you may appear at 275 First St. in Woodland during regular business hours, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Or, payment can be mailed to Yolo Superior Court, Traffic Division, P.O. Box 2085, Woodland, CA 95776.

Payment also can be made by credit card by calling (530) 406-6702 or by using the online traffic interactive system at <http://www.yolo.courts.ca.gov>. There is a nonrefundable transaction fee for all

credit card and debit card payments.

What can I do if I can't afford to pay the entire bail amount? You can call the Traffic Division at (530) 406-6702 or appear in the clerk's office at 275 First St. and request to be set up on payments. You will need to fill out the appropriate forms. A one-time accounts receivable fee of \$35 will be added to your case. Your monthly payment will be a minimum of \$100 per month. If you can't afford the \$100 per month, you can apply for a reduced amount by filling out the appropriate form.

I don't want this ticket on my driving record. What can I do? If you receive a citation for a moving violation such as speeding, running a red light, stop sign, etc., you may be able to get your citation dismissed from your driving record by attending traffic violator school. If you successfully complete traffic school, no points will be assigned to your driving record and your insurance company will not be able to see the violation. Nonmoving violations such as seat belt and registration are not eligible for traffic school.

To qualify for traffic school, you must not have any failures to appear or failures to pay on your driving record; have not attended traffic school within the past 18 months; the citation must not be alcohol-related; and you must have a valid noncommercial driver's license.

If you meet these requirements, you must pay the entire amount of bail plus a \$66 court administrative fee to receive the court's approved list of schools. This may be done in person at the clerk's office at 275 First St., or by mail: Yolo Superior Court, P.O. Box 2085, Woodland, CA 95776.

How do I take care of a correctable ticket? If the citation was for a correctable violation, you must submit proof of correction at the time of your payment or appearance along with a \$25 per charge fix-it fee. Please visit <http://www.yolo.courts.ca.gov> for additional information

What happens when I go to court? Your first court appearance is your arraignment. This is where the judicial officer informs you of the charges against you and advises you of your constitutional rights. You may enter a plea of guilty, not guilty or nolo contendere (no contest). You may also request traffic school at this time.

Guilty means you admit the violation occurred. Please understand that you may admit the violation occurred and explain the circumstances to the judicial officer.

Not guilty means you deny the violation. A hearing with the citing officer present will be set for another date and time. You may hire an attorney to represent you in court. At the trial, you should be prepared to produce all evidence and/or any witnesses necessary to your case. See below for other options for pleading not guilty.

No contest means you neither admit nor deny the violation occurred. This plea is treated the same as a guilty plea.

Can I plead not guilty without having to go to court? If your charge is eligible, you also may plead not guilty one of the following ways:

n Written plea in lieu of personal appearance: With this option, you will not need to appear at your arraignment date. You must fill out the appropriate form and post the bail amount in full. You will only need to show up at your trial date. Not all charges are eligible for this option.

n Trial by declaration: With this option, you will be able to have your trial in writing, without a court appearance. You must fill out the appropriate forms at the clerk's office or on the court's Web site and post the bail amount in full. Not all charges are eligible for this option.

I missed my arraignment date. Now what? If you fail to appear at the arraignment or trial date, a civil assessment penalty of \$300 may be added to your case and a failure-to-appear hold may be placed on your driver's license. Also, if you fail to pay the fine, an additional civil assessment penalty may be added and a failure-to-pay hold may be placed on your driver's license. The failure-to-pay hold will not be released from your license until the fine is paid in full.

Did you know? The Traffic Division is one of the busiest departments at Yolo Superior Court. In 2006, there were 21,640 traffic infractions filed. That number grew to 22,275 in 2007 and 27,640 in 2008, a 28 percent increase. Each day, the Traffic Division helps approximately 300 to 350 customers and answers an average of 200 phone calls.

- David Rosenberg, a Davis resident, is presiding judge of the Yolo Superior Court. For additional information, go to:

<http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/selfhelp>

<http://www.yolo.courts.ca.gov>

<http://www.ctsi-courtnetwork.org>

Where does my bail money go?

Bail amounts and their distribution are set by the California Legislature. The following example shows how a bail amount of \$227 for a speeding violation of 1-15 mph over the 65 mph speed limit is distributed.

Base fine: \$40

Court automation (2%): 80 cents County funds (15%): \$6 City funds (83%): \$33.20

Penalty assessment: \$104 State penalty fund: \$40 County penalty fund: \$28 Court facilities construction fund: \$20 DNA identification fund: \$8 County emergency medical services: \$8

State surcharge 20%: \$8 Court security fee: \$30

Conviction assessment fee: \$35 For building and maintaining trial courts

Prior administrative fee: \$10 Fee for maintaining record of prior convictions; not added to all cases.

Total bail: \$227

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