

No documents touched during traffic stops

**POLICE continued
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needs to self-quarantine.”

Another operational change has been made at the police station itself. When an employee needs to be there to fill out paperwork or catalogue evidence, doors to all offices remain closed.

“We have as many people working remotely as possible in order to keep others from potentially getting sick,” McKnight says.

Additionally, there is a laundry area at the station where patrol officers can wash their uniforms immediately after finishing a shift.

If an officer believes they have been exposed to coronavirus, the department has purchased vehicle sanitizer to use.

“We really want to make sure everyone is taking showers and doing what they need to do,” McKnight says.

He says the risk of contracting COVID-19 was driven home a few weeks before the pandemic hit when one staff member caught a cold and soon everyone in the office was sick.

“I made a decision then to change everyone’s schedules in the office, but kept patrol schedules the same,” he says. “We are doing the best we can to distance from each other, but still doing our jobs to the best of our ability.”

Changes also have been made



Photos by Timothy J. Gonzalez

Tribal Police Officer Tyler Brown monitors traffic along Highway 18 on Friday, May 8. Tribal police officers are wearing masks and gloves while encountering members of the public during the course of their duties.



At left, Brown works on his laptop during a traffic stop.

procedures in a suspect’s home.

“If the person has a small bag of marijuana, we’re not going to endanger an officer or others to go inside,” he says. “But if it’s a felony issue, we would do everything we needed to resolve it. We still do pursuits and apprehend those who are driving recklessly, but so far there have been no major incidents.”

McKnight says the biggest uptick in calls are those dealing with domestic violence, although most have been verbal abuse in nature instead of physical abuse.

“In every (call) situation, we have to evaluate the risk to the officer’s safety,” he says.

McKnight’s department includes a lieutenant, sergeant, four officers and a records/evidence clerk.

during traffic stops. Instead of asking a driver to hand over their license and registration, Tribal police officers are now looking at the documents without touching them and writing information down.

“Right from the get-go, I made an immediate policy change to not take documents,” McKnight says.

Another change involves search

“Everyone has been pretty positive,” he says. “Some of the (officers) don’t have kids and they’re young ... but once we talked to them, they understood (the importance) of the situation.”

With the closure of Spirit Mountain Casino due to COVID-19 and the statewide shelter-in-place order, the need for Tribal police response, particularly to calls that involve driving infractions, has been reduced. Additionally, events where police are invited to attend have all been canceled.

“My officers are getting a bit bored,” McKnight says. “They are proactive and want to be in the community, so it’s taken awhile to adjust. But the good part is we’ve been able to complete a lot of needed online training.”

And his advice to motorists who are pulled over but hesitant to interact with an officer due to COVID-19 concerns?

“I would suggest wearing a mask if you’re worried about talking to an officer,” McKnight says. “But you definitely need to comply with what they are asking you to do. Be respectful and let them know your concerns.”

After the state begins to re-open on Friday, May 15, and the casino resumes operations, things will still look different.

“When we get back to ‘normal’ operations, the officers will still be wearing masks and gloves until there is a vaccine available,” McKnight says. “Also, the door will remain closed at the police department and we are asking people to use our nonemergency line to call or text (541-921-2927) if they have questions or concerns.” ■

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