



4 TIPS FOR SAFER TRAFFIC STOPS



AVOID PROBLEM AREAS

Be deliberate about where you conduct a traffic stop.

Where you make a stop is one of the few things under your control.

Examples of potentially hazardous locations:

- Busy or congested intersections
- Roadways without shoulder area
- Immediately in front of establishments where groups of people congregate (bars, bus stops, storefronts, apartment buildings)

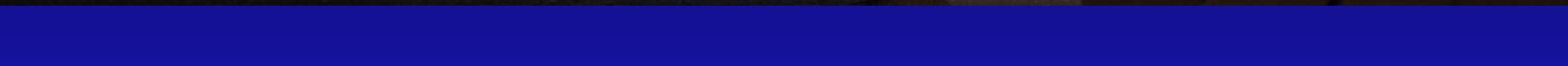
The more going on around you, the more likely you'll be distracted from what your primary focus should be: the vehicle and the potential threats inside.

If you make a stop in front of a busy restaurant or the middle of a busy roadway, your attention will be divided between the stop and your surroundings.

The more you're concerned with the hazards around you (i.e. getting hit by oncoming traffic), the less focus you're putting towards the potential hazards involved with the stop itself.

Additionally, making a stop in front of areas where groups of people are congregating invites the potential for agitators to intentionally distract you or get involved in the stop.

This is exacerbated if you end up pulling occupants out the vehicle to conduct a roadside interview, investigative search, or arrest.



The more congested the space, the less area you have to conduct those activities systematically and safely.

Communication may also become a problem.

The louder the environment, the harder it is to communicate to your partners and the occupants.

It also decreases your situational awareness.

Think of how difficult it can be to hear an occupant cracking a vehicle door open to exit while you're sitting in your cruiser typing out a ticket.

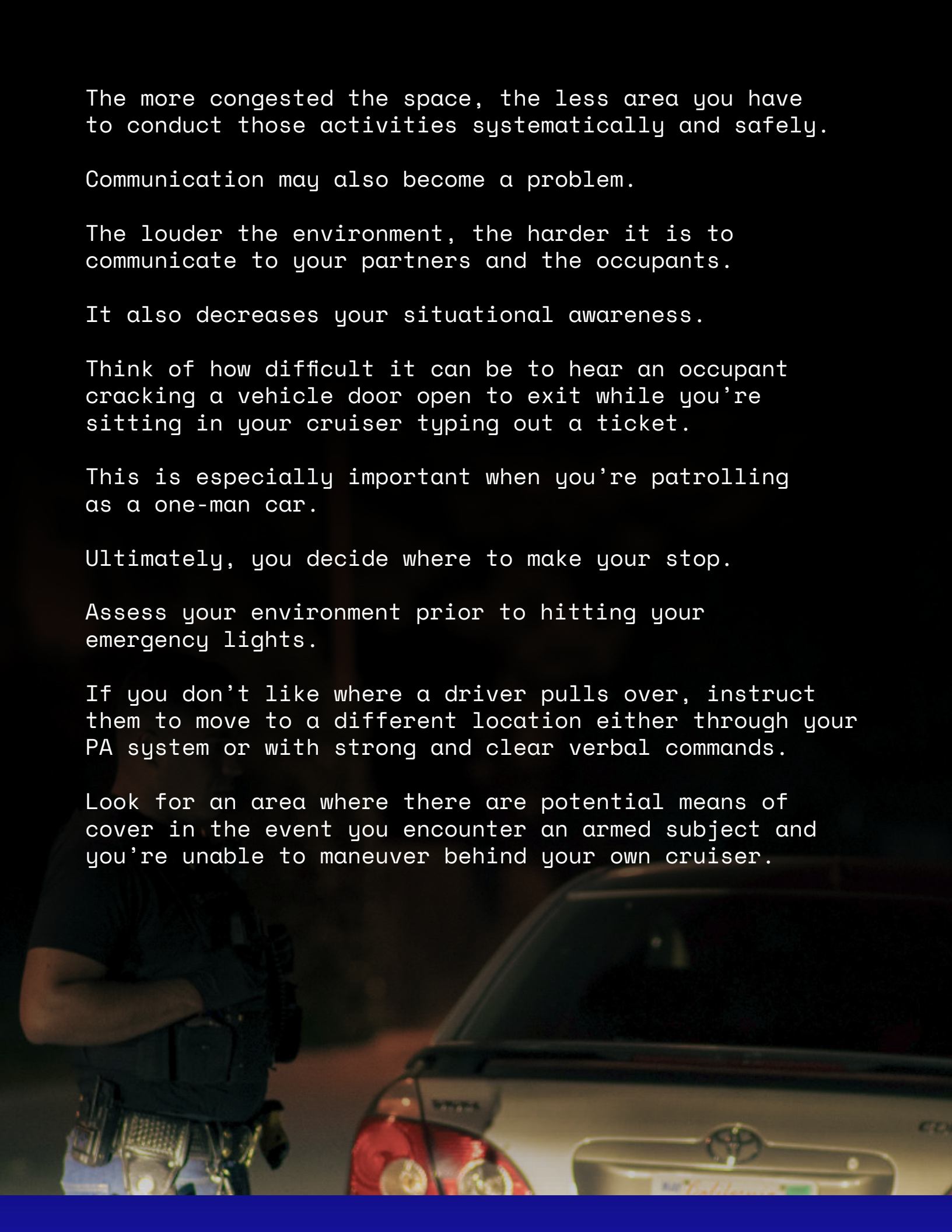
This is especially important when you're patrolling as a one-man car.

Ultimately, you decide where to make your stop.

Assess your environment prior to hitting your emergency lights.

If you don't like where a driver pulls over, instruct them to move to a different location either through your PA system or with strong and clear verbal commands.

Look for an area where there are potential means of cover in the event you encounter an armed subject and you're unable to maneuver behind your own cruiser.



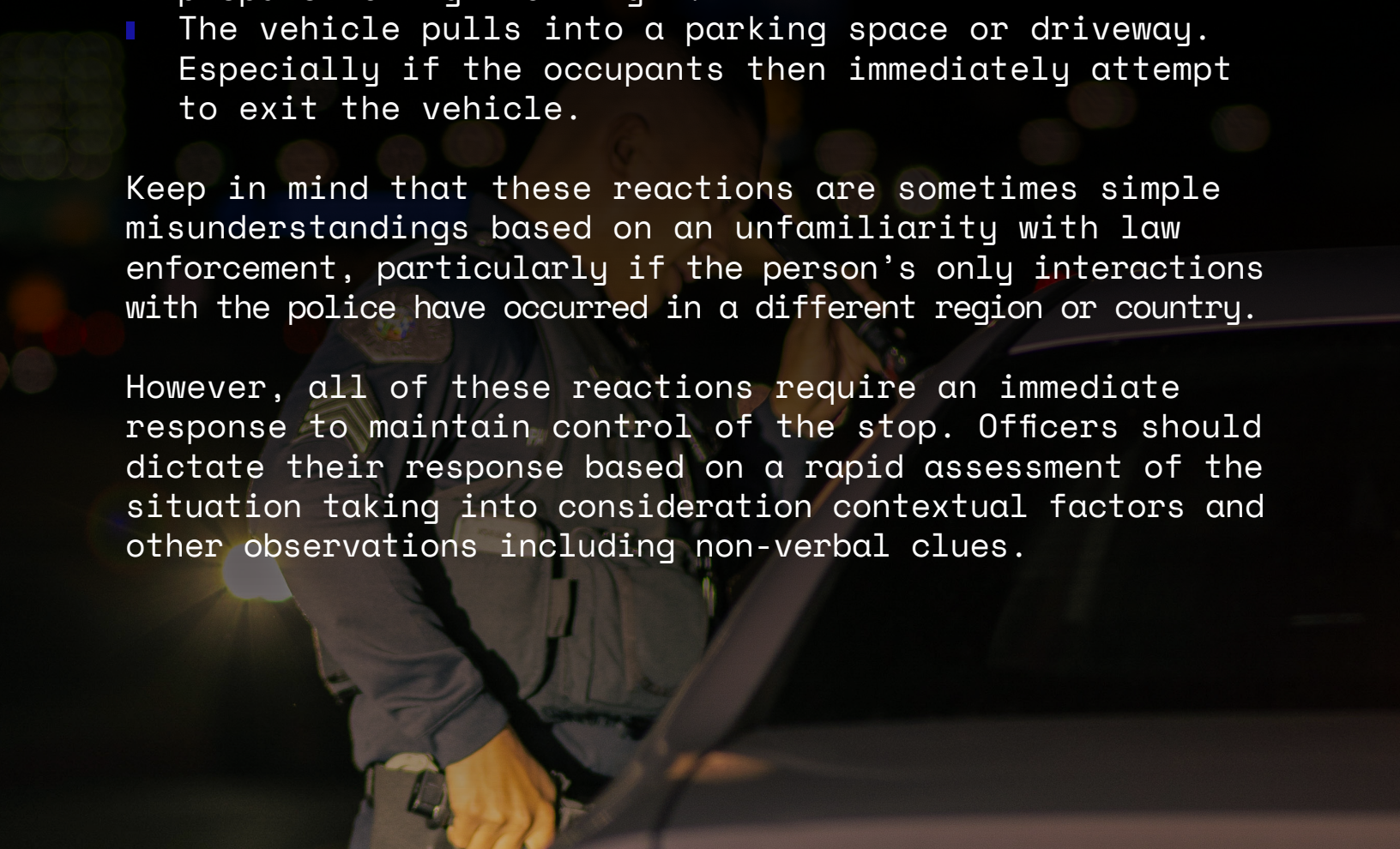
LOOK FOR ABNORMAL REACTIONS

If you pull a traffic stop and observe these behaviors, your awareness should be heightened for criminal activity and the potential for violence:

- The vehicle is very slow to stop (or refuses to stop for a significant period of time). This can indicate that the person is attempting to conceal evidence or processing what their next move will be in order to avoid potential apprehension.
- The vehicle stops quickly and the driver attempts to exit immediately. This could indicate that the subject wants your attention diverted from the vehicle. It may also indicate an attempt to seize control of the situation by intimidating you or to better prepare for fight or flight.
- The vehicle pulls into a parking space or driveway. Especially if the occupants then immediately attempt to exit the vehicle.

Keep in mind that these reactions are sometimes simple misunderstandings based on an unfamiliarity with law enforcement, particularly if the person's only interactions with the police have occurred in a different region or country.

However, all of these reactions require an immediate response to maintain control of the stop. Officers should dictate their response based on a rapid assessment of the situation taking into consideration contextual factors and other observations including non-verbal clues.



If possible, officers should call for backup and actively seek cover while making this assessment. In some cases it will be appropriate to command the subject back into the vehicle while other times it may be more practical to give different directions.

Most importantly is remaining cognizant of these reactions when preparing to make a stop so you are better prepared to respond to them.



TREAT EVERY RE-APPROACH WITH THE SAME VIGILANCE AS THE ORIGINAL APPROACH

When you make a traffic stop, you are making an investigative detention.

Every stop should be treated with the seriousness an investigative detention calls for.

That means that some level of risk is assumed until the entire stop is complete.

Sometimes that risk is known. Perhaps, you are alerted to the criminal history of the registered owner of a vehicle just prior to making the stop.

Most times, however, you'll be approaching a stop of "unknown risk."

There are no "routine" traffic stops.

Police training emphasizes the need for safety when approaching a vehicle.

Until you make contact with the occupants, you may have little visibility or knowledge of who is inside of it. Furthermore, the most common times during a stop officers face opposition is:

1. Immediately after the vehicle comes to its initial stop
2. Upon the officer's initial contact with the occupant

However, that doesn't mean opposition won't happen later in a stop.

Once you've established contact with the driver, you may observe no immediate threat.

You may determine there is no further criminal activity to investigate outside of the traffic violation. This is the point where many officers let their guard down.

Just because you determined that you will be issuing a traffic ticket or warning does not mean you can drift into a state of complacency throughout the remainder of the stop.

You should treat the re-approach with the same vigilance as your original approach.

The time between your initial approach and your re-approach could be the opportunity the occupants are taking to do their own weighing of their options. A threat can appear at any moment, not just on the initial approach.

Avoid spending time in any transitional space (i.e. sitting halfway in your car with your legs halfway out). This is a vulnerable point for the officer either under opposition or from approaching traffic.

Always be mindful of the items you're carrying in your hand as you re-approach the vehicle. Make sure you're keeping your strong side hand free as you would on the initial approach by carrying your flashlight and paperwork in your weak side hand.

You can also train to tuck paperwork into your armpit until you've made your full approach and determine no immediate threat exists.

TRAIN FOR LOW-LIGHT ENVIRONMENTS

A majority of officer involved shootings occur in or around vehicles. And a majority of officer involved shootings occur in low light conditions.

Light equals information in a low-light environment whether you're engaged in a gunfight or attempting to observe a subject in the back seat of a car trying to conceal contraband.

Always optimize your use of light including your takedowns, high-beams and spotlight. Ensure you have effective lighting equipment (i.e. flashlight, weapon-mounted light) with the highest level of lumen lighting possible.

You can also leverage the lighting inside of the subject's own vehicle by instructing a driver to turn on interior vehicle lights before or during your approach.

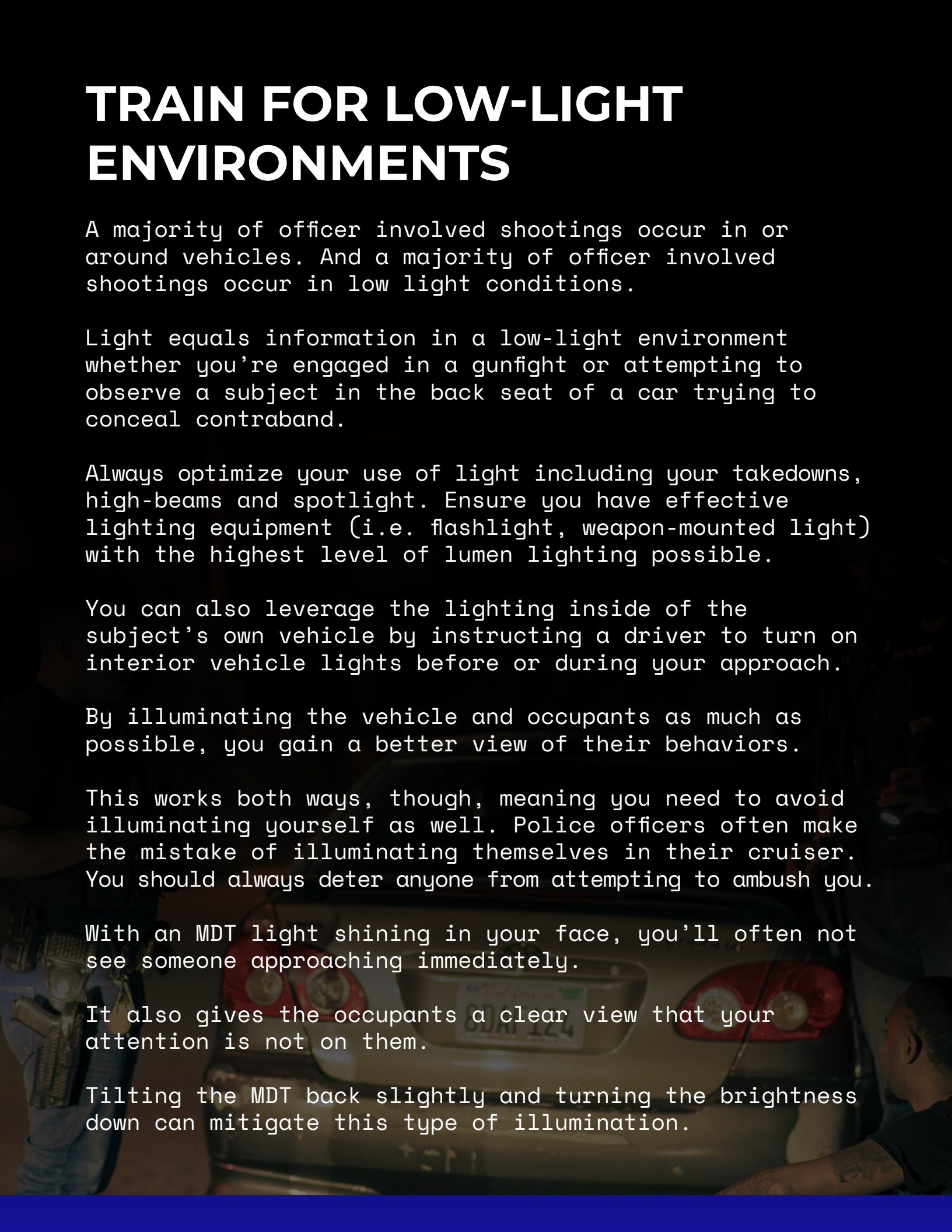
By illuminating the vehicle and occupants as much as possible, you gain a better view of their behaviors.

This works both ways, though, meaning you need to avoid illuminating yourself as well. Police officers often make the mistake of illuminating themselves in their cruiser. You should always deter anyone from attempting to ambush you.

With an MDT light shining in your face, you'll often not see someone approaching immediately.

It also gives the occupants a clear view that your attention is not on them.

Tilting the MDT back slightly and turning the brightness down can mitigate this type of illumination.





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