



# POULSBO POLICE STREET BEAT

EDITION 7



## UNDERSTANDING THE RIGHT-OF-WAY

### Don't Be Polite, Be Predictable

We're getting back to basics in this Street Beat with a topic that comes up constantly in collision investigations: Right-of-Way.

We see drivers all the time trying to be courteous by waving someone through an intersection when it isn't their turn. While the intention is kind, the result is often a crumpled fender (or worse).

Here is a refresher on Washington State law and why following the rules is safer than being "nice."



### The Courtesy Wave

We appreciate that Poulsbo drivers are polite, but sometimes a "courtesy wave" causes more harm than good. This happens when a driver waves another driver who does not have the right-of-way across traffic.

Why is this dangerous? You might stop your car to let someone turn left in front of you. However, you cannot control the car in the lane next to you. That driver isn't expecting you to stop, can't see the turning car past your vehicle, and often T-bones the "helped" driver.

Traffic laws rely on predictability. When you deviate unexpectedly to be polite you disrupt the flow and confuse other drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists who are expecting you to follow the rules.

### Who Actually Has the Right-of-Way?



**Four-Way Stops:** It's "First to Arrive, First to Drive." If two vehicles arrive at the exact same time, the driver on the left must yield to the driver on the right.

**The "Head-to-Head" Tie:** This is one of the most confusing scenarios. If you are stopped across from another car at the same time and one of you is going straight while the other is turning left, the driver going straight goes first.

**Uncontrolled Intersections:** At intersections with no signs or signals (common in neighborhoods), you must yield to the vehicle on your right.



### The Bottom Line

The safest thing you can do on the road is to follow the rules of the road rigidly. If you have the right-of-way, take it. If it is your turn to go, go. Hesitation and "politeness" create uncertainty, and uncertainty causes collisions.

Stay safe out there, Poulsbo!



**Do you have a question you would like us to answer in a future Street Beat? Email us at [streetbeat@cityofpoulsbo.com](mailto:streetbeat@cityofpoulsbo.com).**