

Deputy Mike Zacher uses a handheld computer to scan a driver's license during a traffic stop in Damascus. The device transfers the information — along with details of the speeding violation — to a thermal printer stored in Zacher's motorcycle saddlebag.

ROGER JENSEN  
THE OREGONIAN



# Traffic ticketing technology makes citations painfully clear

**Pulled over** | Drivers lose hope a handwriting mistake will void their ticket as police print from pocket PCs

By **STUART TOMLINSON**  
THE OREGONIAN

DAMASCUS — Handwritten traffic citations are heading the way of billy clubs and six-shot revolvers as police agencies in the Portland area switch to electronic ticketing.

The black pocket PC that Clackamas County sheriff's Deputy Mike Zacher carries in his motorcycle saddlebag is about half the size of his leather-bound

citation book.

The black device looks like a handheld computer. With software, a docking station for downloading information to a central computer and a printer, the cost per unit is \$3,200. The Clackamas County Sheriff's Office purchased six with grant money from the Oregon Department of Transportation.

Clackamas County Sgt. John Naccarato wrote Oregon's first electronic ticket a week ago today in Happy Valley for failure to wear a seat belt.

The Portland Police Bureau will start using similar devices in two to three weeks that will use wireless technology to download the information from the

Please see **TRAFFIC TICKETS**, Page B7

# Traffic tickets: Officer uses stylus to punch in information

Continued from Page B1

street, said Cmdr. Bill Sinnott, the commander of the bureau's Traffic Division.

The Washington County Sheriff's Office bought eight devices with a Department of Transportation grant, and another eight with federal grant money.

"It makes a lot of sense," said Lt. John Black, Washington County sheriff's spokesman. "FedEx and UPS has been using this technology for years."

On a sunny day in the school zone on Southeast 242nd Avenue near Damascus Middle School,

Zacher used the device — coupled with a small thermal printer — to issue six speeding tickets in less than 30 minutes.

The only thing that remotely looked like a pen was the stylus Zacher used to enter information into the pocket PC using a touch screen.

The device uses a built-in scanner to read the bar code on the back of a driver's license, displaying and saving information such as the driver's age and address. It also schedules a court date, calculates the fine and provides a place for Zacher to type in a few notes.

The gadget even speaks, saying "new ticket" and "saving ticket" during the process.

"It might take us a few more minutes at first as we're getting used to the device, but after that it's going to save us a lot of time," Zacher said.

Naccarato said the Transportation Department chose the Clackamas County Sheriff's Office to be

the first to test the devices in Oregon about a year ago, with the backing of Clackamas County Circuit Court.

He said the benefits they offer officers and the county include:

- Increased legibility. "You can actually read what's on the ticket," Naccarato said. The device sends information directly to a wireless thermal printer in the patrol car or motorcycle that prints out the ticket. Rain won't smudge the ink.
- Speed. Once officers learn to use the device, it should take half the time to write a ticket. The officer's signature, loaded into the device, signs the ticket automatically.
- Accuracy. The system should ensure that officers don't inadvertently assign court dates on holidays or weekends. The New York City Police Department started using similar devices in 2003 after finding that about 13 percent of tickets contained errors.
- Record-keeping and data input. From a docking port, the device

can send data from 100 tickets to the county's database and the county courthouse in about 2 seconds. Before, each ticket had to be individually entered into the county's database.

"I used to have to make five copies," Zacher said. "One copy went to the driver, three to the file room, one to the court. When we went to court, we had to go to the file room for copies. Now it's all in the computer."

The system is not without glitches. During one traffic stop, the device wouldn't read an old, worn driver's license. Zacher reluctantly pulled out the bulky citation book and wrote the driver a ticket by hand.

"That's the first time that's happened today. I guess it's Murphy's Law," he said. "But I've been doing this for 10 years and it's going to save me from doing a lot of paperwork."

Stuart Tomlinson: 503-294-5940;  
stuarttomlinson@news.oregonian.com