



Report Suggests More Black Drivers Searched by Amarillo Police

02/16/2006 AMARILLO -- Racial profiling is something that many believe, or at least hope, isn't happening. The data in a report released Thursday, however, shows that during traffic stops, Amarillo Police ask black drivers for a consent search disproportionately more than other races.

If a driver gets pulled over, police can get the driver's consent to search the car. In all traffic stops in the state, a little over 2% of drivers are asked for a consent to search. But, in Amarillo, over 9% are asked.

"We found in the past that consent searches rarely result in findings of contraband and are ineffective and are directing officers time away from preventing actual crimes," says Molly Totman, an analyst for Texas Criminal Justice Coalition.

That group put a report together breaking down the numbers of consent searches by race in Amarillo. Of all Whites pulled over, 7.6% consent to search. Of all Hispanics, it's 9.4 percent. Of all African-Americans pulled over, 22% are asked for consent to search. That's the highest number of all cities in the state of Texas, according to the report.

Amarillo Police Corporal Jerry Neufeld says, "It's something we don't practice, don't want anything to do with, we don't want our officers doing that, and we're going to do everything we can to make sure it doesn't happen."

Civil rights lawyer Jeff Blackburn says, "They're really targeting way too many African Americans over other racial groups, that's an undeniable conclusion you reach from that report."

But, police say many of the consent searches happen when they stake out a drug house and see someone leaving.

"We have no idea at two in the morning who's driving that vehicle that just left that drug house until we go up there and approach that driver. Whether it's white, black, Hispanic, Asian -- whatever the case may be." says Neufeld.

Totman says, "Directing officers into an area is fine if community members have complained about a problem."

The key for the researchers is whether police are stopping people based on hunches. And Amarillo Police say, despite the numbers, that's not something they do.

They also say have never received a founded complaint of racial profiling. Defense Attorney Jeff Blackburn says many people wouldn't complain.

In the report, the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition says that some police departments submitted reports with potentially inaccurate data, while other city's reports were incomplete.

<http://www.kamr.com/news/default.asp?mode=shownews&id=1195>