



On Patrol

Real stories from officers in the field

Compiled by Bob Lucas
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EDITOR'S NOTE: *Environmental Conservation Officers (ECOs) are police officers sworn to uphold the laws of New York State with an emphasis on the Environmental Conservation Law. The following are actual accounts.*

You're Fired—Ulster County

ECO Harcher investigated a report of illegal dumping in the parking lot of a church in Marlborough. She estimated that several cubic yards of household garbage had been dumped on the edge of the parking lot. Evidence found in the trash determined that the garbage had been picked up for carting by County Waste company. The ECO contacted the owner of County Waste and determined the garbage pick up had been made by a recently hired County Waste driver. The driver was summoned for questioning and admitted to dumping the garbage. Asked why he dumped the garbage at the church parking lot, the driver said he "needed to leave work early for an appointment." He was charged with illegally disposing more than 10 cubic yards of waste at an unpermitted facility, a misdemeanor, and released to return to the disposal site to assist his boss and fellow employees in cleaning up. After helping clean up the garbage, the driver was fired.

Clearing the Air—Nassau County

ECO Burnell was patrolling in West Islip when he noticed the odor of natural gas. As the odor grew stronger, he heard a loud hissing noise coming from a small construction site on the side of a road. A work crew had been digging and had apparently broken a natural gas line. Burnell ordered the crew to evacuate and with the help of some truckers blocked traffic from the area. ECO Burnell contacted the KeySpan Gas Company and the gas line was shut down within minutes, averting a potentially disastrous situation.

DWI on ATV—Steuben County

ECO Hulett observed an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) being driven down the middle of a rural road. Upon seeing the uniformed officer, the operator accelerated the machine in an attempt to avoid being stopped. Officer Hulett was able to catch and safely stop the ATV, and after sobriety tests it was evident the operator was intoxicated. The drunken ATV operator was arrested and placed in the custody of the Steuben County Sheriff's office for processing on a felony DWI charge. ECO Hulett also issued several tickets for violations of the Vehicle and Traffic Law relating to the operation of ATVs. The operator said he was using the ATV because his driver's license had been revoked for previous DWI convictions.

Ask the ECO

Q: Where can I legally operate my all-terrain vehicle (ATV)?

A: ATVs are primarily limited to private land where you have permission to ride. At this time very few trails on public lands are designated for ATV use.

The Vehicle and Traffic Law specifically prohibits the operation of ATVs on roads or on public lands or trails, unless they are designated and posted for ATV use. The law also prohibits the operation of ATVs on other's private lands unless you have the owner's permission.

You should research areas where you would like to ride and secure the necessary permission for private lands. If the area where you would like to ride is state, county or other public land, you should consult with the agency that administers the property to see if ATV use is permitted.

—Lt. Ken Didion