

Speed Camera Operators in Northern Ireland Face Growing Threats and Abuse

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— Categories: Crime



Concerns have been raised over the safety of speed camera operators in Northern Ireland, with fresh attention on repeated incidents involving verbal abuse, threats, and even physical attacks against staff inside mobile road safety vans.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) confirmed that these incidents are not isolated. There have been occasions when operators have been assaulted and their vehicles targeted. These mobile camera vans, operated by the Northern Ireland Road Safety

Partnership (NIRSP), are deployed across around 230 sites to detect speeding drivers and prevent road accidents.

During a recent operation in east Belfast, the Press Association joined a safety van crew stationed in a 40mph zone. Within just 30 minutes, seven motorists were found exceeding the speed limit. However, it wasn't long before the van attracted negative attention. A photo of the vehicle was quickly shared on social media alongside an abusive caption, while nearby drivers shouted profanities and honked their horns.

The operator, protected only by a perspex shield fitted in front of the camera, explained that such reactions have become part of the job. He reported frequent verbal abuse, attempts by individuals to photograph him, and confirmed that some of his colleagues had suffered physical assaults while on duty.

Chief Superintendent Sam Donaldson, the PSNI's head of road safety, acknowledged the growing hostility and described it as unacceptable. He highlighted that the abuse stems from a persistent misunderstanding of the vans' role in improving road safety.

"I have lots of concerns around this. First of all, there is the generic sentiment as a community towards the deployment of the vans. They are still seen as a negative thing," he said in a recent interview with *Belfast Live*.

He explained that hostility typically intensifies during targeted deployments, especially when footage or images of the vans appear on social media platforms, leading to spikes in online abuse.

The Chief Superintendent emphasised that although physical attacks are not a daily occurrence, they have happened more than once, prompting a review of health and safety measures. One such review followed an incident in which a van was attacked using a weapon.

While some members of the public complain about where the vans are positioned, Mr Donaldson pushed back against these criticisms. He said some drivers become more concerned about whether a van was "hidden" rather than confronting the fact that they were speeding, often near schools or areas frequented by children.

"I get that frustration, and I get the fact that people will write in from time to time and say it was behind a bus stop, or the police officer was behind a lamppost, I am sorry, but you are

not going to get a lot of sympathy from me around that. You shouldn't be speeding," he said.

Mr Donaldson also addressed widespread misconceptions regarding the funding of the NIRSP and where the money from penalties goes. He clarified that all income generated through fines and fees is reinvested into road safety initiatives within Northern Ireland.

"All the money that the Road Safety Partnership generates as a result of both fines and fees is reinvested back into road safety. It doesn't go to the Government," he explained.

He added that any unspent funds at the end of the financial year are returned to the Government, just like any other agency or department. However, the main portion is used for equipment maintenance, staff wages, and the overall operation of the road safety programme.

Ultimately, the PSNI reiterated that the core purpose of the mobile camera units is not to punish motorists but to prevent speeding and save lives. Mr Donaldson urged the public to reconsider their reaction to these measures, stressing that preventing speeding in high-risk areas should be the priority, not targeting the visibility or location of the vans.

The recent incidents have sparked renewed calls for public cooperation and respect towards those working to make Northern Ireland's roads safer.