

Northern Ireland Police Target Abuse of Speed Camera Staff

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The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) has raised the alarm over repeated incidents of abuse and violence directed at mobile speed camera operators. Chief Superintendent Sam Donaldson has called for an end to the behaviour, describing it as both dangerous and unacceptable.

Twelve mobile enforcement vans operated by the Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership are deployed at over 230 locations across the region to deter speeding. However, staff manning these units have increasingly found themselves the target of threats, verbal abuse, and in some cases, physical assault.

In a recent operation observed by the *PA news agency* in east Belfast, a camera van positioned in a 40mph zone detected seven speeding motorists in under 30 minutes. Within minutes of its arrival, a photo of the van was posted on social media, accompanied by abusive remarks. One driver hurled obscenities at the van, while others honked aggressively as they passed.

Operators now work behind protective perspex shields and have reported regular verbal abuse, attempts to photograph them, and cases of physical confrontation involving colleagues.

Speaking on the matter, Chief Superintendent Donaldson acknowledged the problem is more widespread than many realise:

“These are not one-off incidents. We’ve had vans and staff attacked on multiple occasions. While not a daily occurrence, it happens often enough to raise serious concern,” he said.

Public scepticism over the use of camera vans is, according to Mr Donaldson, partly to blame. He argued that too many drivers see them as punitive rather than preventive.

“The idea that these vans exist to generate revenue is a persistent myth. If no drivers are caught speeding, that’s the best outcome,” he added. “The purpose is to deter dangerous driving, particularly in areas near schools or where pedestrians are at risk.”

Mr Donaldson also addressed recurring complaints that vans are placed in concealed locations to ‘trap’ drivers.

“If someone is caught speeding near children or in a built-up area, and their concern is whether the van was behind a lamppost, they’ve missed the point entirely. The issue isn’t where the van is, it’s the fact that they were speeding in the first place.”

There have been serious incidents. In one case, a van was attacked with a weapon, prompting a full review of health and safety policies and operator risk assessments.

The senior officer also moved to correct claims that the initiative is designed to profit the government. He made clear that all revenue collected from fixed penalty notices is reinvested directly into road safety initiatives in Northern Ireland, including staff wages, van upkeep, and essential equipment.

“No money goes to the Northern Ireland Executive or UK Government. It all returns to the partnership and is used to improve road safety,” Mr Donaldson said.

Despite the abuse, the PSNI remains committed to ensuring mobile enforcement teams continue their work.

“These vans are saving lives. They’re not the enemy,” Mr Donaldson concluded. “The public needs to stop seeing them as a threat and start recognising their role in protecting communities.”

The PSNI and the Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership are urging the public to support efforts aimed at reducing road casualties, not undermining them.