

From the desk of Officer Marshall Morehead

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What is Legal Window Tint?

Officer's come up to me all the time with ideas for the weekly column, and just last week Sgt. Cook approached me and said "I think we need to put an article in the paper explaining the window tint laws". I always appreciate when officers or citizens talk to me about their ideas for the article because it gets more people involved and helps me to see what other people's concerns are. The reason Officer's want things explained is because, contrary to popular opinion, we would really rather people be aware of the laws and not break them. I know that's a silly concept, but it's true. Unlike the Dukes of Hazard we don't hide speed limit signs behind bushes and then jump out to catch you or try to write tickets to you or lock you up for things you honestly don't know. When it all comes down to it ignorance of the law is no excuse, but we would much rather people know ahead of time and avoid accidentally breaking the law.

So, now that I've successfully run that rabbit, back to the point. With only a few rays of sunshine falling down from Heaven lately it's hard to believe that one of the questions I field the most is "what is legal window tint?" When the summer sun is so bright, when we can see it, and with temperatures warming up everyone is looking for a way to keep the interior of their vehicles just a little cooler. Tinting your windows is just one way of doing that. But it is also important to make sure you stay within the legal parameters while doing this.

Any tint that is less than 27%, reflective, or placed below the AS1 line (the AS1 line is located on the front windshield and is approximately six inches below the top of the glass) is in violation of SC law 56-5-5015. City of Walterboro officers use a tint meter to check if the tint of a window is appropriate. This meter works by sliding the meter over the glass. It then passes light from one side (where a built in emitter is housed) to the other side (where a built in receptor is housed). The meter then measures the amount of light the window allowed to pass through and displays it for the officer. In an SUV or Pickup truck any windows other than the driver's compartment (front driver's and passenger's side windows) can be legally tinted below the 27%. The only exceptions to this law are Postal vehicles, people with an appropriate medical condition with a doctor's prescription or Law Enforcement vehicles (but only if they contain a K-9 unit), some things to think about when getting your windows tinted. Even though it may be legal and look good when the sun is shining bright, remember that you're going to have the same tint on your window when it's dark, hazy or stormy. This will impair your ability to see (as well as you could through un-tinted glass) and the probability of you being involved in an accident could increase. From an Officer's point of view tinted windows could mean the difference between life and death. Prepare to be approached differently in a vehicle with darkly tinted windows. This is simply because we can't see inside your vehicle as well and are more prone to be extra cautious.

Hopefully this will help you to be more informed and aid in making the right decisions. Thank you again for your time and for helping us to better serve you.