



## U-turn on crash tax

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The City of Wyoming should put a stop sign on its crash tax. Charging non-residents a fee for police response to traffic accidents has cost the city more in bad publicity than it has collected.

Public safety is the primary responsibility of government. Making visitors to your city pay for what is basic police work is not only inhospitable, but an attempt to get out-of-towners to subsidize police operations.

People pay taxes in their own communities for basic police service. They shouldn't have to pay in other localities, too. Wyoming voters have refused to approve additional tax dollars for its police department. Non-residents shouldn't be targeted to pick up the slack.

Under a plan approved by Wyoming's City Council last year, if non-residents cause an accident in the city, their insurance company is billed for any associated police costs. If insurers don't pay, drivers are held responsible. Wyoming is using Ohio-based Cost Recovery Corp. (CRC), to do the billing. Since instituting the fee last July, Wyoming has collected about \$39,000. The city anticipated bringing in \$200,000 a year.

The money no doubt is tempting for a city that has laid off 30 police and fire personnel in the last two years because of budget woes, but responding to traffic accidents is part of basic police work. People from neighboring communities are not entering a foreign country when traveling in Wyoming. There should be an expectation that public safety will be available without a price tag. What happens if other area cities adopt this self-serving strategy?

Police officers are a community's primary public safety officials. Securing crash scenes to make sure roadways are safe, investigating accidents to determine who's at fault, whether tickets are appropriate and filing incident reports shouldn't be a special service for which non-residents have to pay extra. It should be part of what officers do for the salary they receive.

About 56 percent of invoices sent out for Wyoming police fees have been paid. But insurance companies are paying few of the claims that generally range between \$200 to \$400. The bulk of the \$39,000 collected has come directly from the pockets of motorists, not insurers. The breakdown is 36 percent paid by insurance companies and 63 percent by individual drivers.

While non-residents don't pay taxes to directly support city services, they do contribute to Wyoming's coffers by spending money in the city's restaurants, shopping in its stores and patronizing other businesses. The police fee simply gives people a reason to avoid the area.

While many communities in recent years have started charging for fire calls or false alarm responses, charging for basic police service is a new concept. Wyoming is the only Michigan city to charge such a fee.

A citizens task force will review the police fee in the coming months and make recommendations about whether it should continue.

It shouldn't. Wyoming Mayor Carol Sheets and City Council members shouldn't need advice from a citizens group. They should drop this ill-advised fee.

Responding to fender benders and other accidents is part of basic police service, not a money-making opportunity for cash-strapped departments. Wyoming needs to make a U-turn on its police response fee.

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