

Thousands snared after stealth drop in speed 'limit' by 1mph

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Transport Editor

The Metropolitan Police's "speed tolerance" has been cut by 1mph, triggering a 259 per cent increase in the number of motorists being penalised for driving too fast.

The tougher rules, quietly introduced, mean 347,000 drivers have been warned they will be prosecuted for speeding between January and June this year, compared with 97,000 in the six months before the change.

Driving at any speed over the official limit is an offence, but police guidelines issued by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) say drivers should be given some leeway.

The guidelines set out a formula whereby motorists should face no action unless

the doubt under the "plus 3mph" formula.

However, enforcement across the country could become stricter, with the NPCC saying that it intends to review its guidance.

Steve McNamara, general secretary of the Licensed Taxi Drivers' Association, said it had seen "an absolutely massive increase in taxi drivers receiving three, six, nine and 12 points in a three or four-week period – some of whom have been driving 35 years as a professional driver without a single point on their licence".

He said there were taxi drivers in Park Lane in central London "getting caught at three o'clock in the morning for doing 23 miles an hour and losing their livelihood". The road used to have a 40mph limit.

Edmund King, the AA president, said tougher enforcement could lead to more drivers switching on their intelligent speed limiters, which gradually slow the car by restricting the fuel and sounding an alarm.

"If drivers struggle with the limits, most modern cars have speed limiters and often sat navs will flag up speed warnings," King said. "It is not worth chancing your licence or indeed a potential road collision by relying on unwritten levels of tolerance."

Nick Freeman, a solicitor known for defending celebrities such as David Beckham and Andrew Flintoff in speeding cases, said motorists should not rely on being given any leeway. "Many motorists just assume that they have the right, an entitlement to exceed the speed limit by that tolerance. From a legal perspective, they're wrong."

Scotland Yard says that if a pedestrian is hit by a vehicle at 20mph, they are about five times less likely to be fatally injured than at 30mph.

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24mph

Speed allowed in 20mph zone with "10 per cent plus 2"

they break the speed limit by 10 per cent plus 2mph. This means a motorist in a 20mph limit can expect to get away with driving at 24mph before they receive a fixed penalty or are sent on a speed awareness course. On a 70mph road, it is 79mph.

The Met reduced its speed tolerances from a formula of 10 per cent plus 3mph (25mph in a 20 zone) to 10 per cent plus 2mph on May 14, 2019, but did not announce it, saying: "Posted speed limits are the maximum speed that road users should travel at any time ... irrespective of the speed threshold that police commence enforcement action."

Other police forces, including Lancashire, still give motorists the benefit of