



\*\*\*Press Release\*\*\*

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## Aviation Becoming Increasingly Important Tool for State's Law Enforcement

**Bremerton, Wash.** - On Saturday evening, (4/29/23) a Washington State Patrol (WSP) sergeant spotted a Ford Fusion traveling at a high rate of speed on State Route 3. The sergeant noted the car was traveling close to 100 miles-per-hour (mph) in a 45 mph construction zone and attempted to stop the car, but the driver did not yield to his lights and kept going. The sergeant quickly determined the conditions did not meet the current legal criterion for continued pursuit, turned off his lights, radioed their position and stopped following the vehicle.

However, the speeding car was being followed and some 22 minutes and many more miles later, the driver was taken into custody. 'Smokey 3,' one of the five Cessna aircraft used by WSP in traffic control, was overhead. Using its advanced Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR) cameras, the WSP pilots were able to identify the speeding vehicle, follow it from the safety of the air, and lead ground-based troopers to the suspect attempting to hide after hurriedly parking and leaving the car in a church parking lot. Smokey 3 was also able to record the speeds (at times exceeding 125 MPH) and route history of the vehicle that can now be provided as evidence in court.

Apprehended in a wooded area after dark, the suspect, a 35-year-old Bremerton woman, was very surprised she had had been captured or even followed in an era when pursuit laws, put in place to limit the inherent dangers of high speed roadway chases, have reduced the number of pursuits authorized by law enforcement in the state. Recent modification of those laws will likely offer law enforcement more flexibility in pursuit decisions, but other resources like aviation and cameras are being deployed in increasing numbers to locate, capture, and hopefully deter drivers from the dangerous and illegal decision to flee from police.

WSP Chief John R Batiste noted, "This is another situation where our people just do not give up! Those planes and their pilots and support staff are all force multipliers. Whether it is assisting ground units in capturing dangerous drivers like this one and many others involved in criminal activity, providing critical overhead photography during natural disasters, or transporting state personnel to impacted areas after a major event, the hundreds of flight hours put in each year make a huge difference on our streets and in our communities."

(cont.)

Part of the agency's Special Operations Division, the WSP Aviation Section occupies a renovated commercial hanger at the Olympia Airport. The six aircraft kept at the high security facility are carefully maintained by two mechanics and a maintenance supervisor. The pilot corps consists of five troopers, one sergeant and one lieutenant. In addition to the five Cessnas (three 182 models and two 206 models) the fleet also includes the all-weather King Air 200. WSP Aviation also has five additional Reserve Tactical Flight Officers (TFOs) deployed across the state. The pilot and a TFO are able to use the FLIR cameras and sophisticated electronic monitoring equipment called Augmented Reality Systems (ARS) to obtain tracking history and speed readings which they can relay to ground units from WSP or other agencies any time day or night.

WSP aircraft are also used in Homeland Security providing surveillance assistance during critical operations as well as offering surveillance resources in law enforcement narcotics operations, and in various search and rescue operations across the state.

"Our Aviation Section saves lives," said Chief Batiste. "They help us to both catch criminals and keep the public safe on our highways."

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