

License plate format examined

By Erin Schulte
Staff Reporter

After a redesign of the artwork on Nebraska's license plates, the numbers could get a different look, too, if a format-change bill is passed by the Nebraska Legislature.



L B 1 3 5 8 would make plate numbers alpha-numeric, with three letters followed by three numbers. The letters and numbers would

not indicate what county the car was from.

Proponents of the bill, discussed Monday in the Transportation Committee, included officials from the Nebraska Department of Motor Vehicles.

In a letter to Sen. Ron Withem of Papillion, who introduced the bill, Alvin Abramson, director of the Nebraska DMV, said the bill would make license manufacturing easier and more cost-effective.

County designation — the first one or two numbers on current plates — creates plate inventory problems and forces guesswork in ordering a specific number of plates per county, Abramson said.

If the bill passes and takes effect in 1999, plates could be ordered in bulk for the entire state because numbers

would not be county-specific.

One argument against the bill was that people often felt attached to their license plate numbers. A provision in the bill would allow current plate numbers to be kept for a yearly \$20 fee.

Charles Stava of Omaha, who testified in opposition to the bill, said he was attached to his license plate number and didn't feel he should have to pay to keep it.

Sen. George Coordsen of Hebron said he could relate to Stava's situation. He's had his license plate number — 1130 — since he was 16, and he remembers it as his curfew in high school.

The committee is scheduled to vote on the bill today.

Law & Order

A LOOK AT CRIME ON CAMPUS AND IN THE COMMUNITY

RAPE

Police are looking for a man who burst into an apartment near 16th and P streets Sunday and raped the woman living there.

At 2:11 a.m., the victim heard someone knock on her door, Heermann said. When she opened it, a man wearing light-colored pants and a gray shirt with black and white stripes pushed the door open, she said.

He forced himself in, raped her and left, Heermann said.

Police are looking for a white male with curly blond hair, 25 to 30 years of age, about 5 feet 7 inches tall, and 150 to 180 pounds.

screamed, and the boys fled.

Police are looking for two black males, 14 to 15 years of age, both about 5 feet tall and of medium build.

ARSON

Lincoln police on Friday arrested a man on suspicion of arson for allegedly starting a fire in a car and an apartment building.

Jeremiah McFarland, 19, was arrested after police found a fire burning at the door of an apartment on the 500 block of North 24th Street, Sgt. Ann Heermann said.

Gay Culver, who lives in the apartment, told police that McFarland had pounded on her door and windows at 4:45 a.m. Friday and yelled for her, but she wouldn't answer the door.

A few minutes later, a neighbor called police to report a fire near Culver's door.

Upon arrival, police found a box of paper burning on a table near Culver's door and clothes on fire in the passenger side of Culver's 1979 Chevy Malibu, Heermann said.

Police later apprehended McFarland at 26th and K streets, Heermann said. Police believe McFarland may have been a boyfriend of Culver's baby-sitter.

ATTEMPTED ROBBERY

A Lincoln woman was attacked by two juveniles Sunday night but managed to keep them from taking her purse.

Thoa Nguyen, 43, was walking on North 26th Street between Vine and U streets at 8:30 p.m. when two boys approached her.

One hit her in the face with a one-inch thick tree limb, and the boys tried to grab her purse.

Nguyen held on tight and

Gas-related fires can be prevented

By Chad Lorenz
Senior Reporter

Dangerous gas leaks from appliances, such as one that caused an explosion in a Lincoln home last weekend, can be prevented with careful detection, proper maintenance and durable equipment.

Lincoln Fire Chief Charlie Beachamp said natural gas connectors for appliances should be double-walled tubing approved by the American Gas Association.

A gas stove connector probably responsible for an explosion Saturday morning at a Lincoln home was an older, single-walled tube, Beachamp said.

The 89-year-old man injured in that fire, James Walsh, was still in critical condition Monday night at St. Elizabeth's Community Health Center.

People should be cautious of gas leaks in homes and businesses because the loose gas could easily start on fire if left untreated, he said.

"Any spark, such as the spark from a light switch or even static electricity from walking across a carpet, could be the source of ignition," Beachamp said.

Jan Davis, public relations director for Peoples Natural Gas, said if people suspected their appliance might have a leaky connector or any other malfunction, they should call the gas company for a free inspection of the appliance and the gas line.

"When it's used properly, it (natural gas) is one of the safest energy forms," Davis said.

People can detect gas leaks easily by a distinct odorant, called Mercaptan, the gas company adds to odorless natural gas, she said.

"We have a saying that the nose knows best," Davis said. "The slightest amount can be detected."

If the connector is potentially leaky, gas service professionals will replace it on site for only the cost of the new connector, Davis said.

"Any spark, such as the spark from a light switch or even static electricity from walking across a carpet, could be the source of ignition."

CHARLIE BEACHAMP
Lincoln fire chief

Beachamp said lighting pilots on gas appliances could be dangerous, too.

The owner should follow the manufacturers' instructions for the appliances and let gas flow for the right amount of time, he said. Otherwise, a dangerous amount of gas may escape when the pilot is lighted.

"It goes a-whoosh and causes a flash fire," Beachamp said.

Gas leaks are responsible for only a few fires each year. The explosion Saturday was the first fire caused by natural gas this winter, he said.

When firefighters battle gas-related fires, they don't put the flames out until the gas flow stops, Beachamp said.

"It's best to let it burn until you know for a fact, 'I know the source and it's shut off,'" Beachamp said. "When it's burning, you know where it is."

If the flames are extinguished when gas is still flowing, they could reignite a larger amount and cause an explosion, he said.

The gas company is responsible for finding the source and shutting it off, which sometimes involves digging to access the stop box, Beachamp said.

Davis said Peoples Natural Gas periodically sent out a scratch and sniff sample of natural gas odorant attached to customers' bills so they were familiar with the smell.

"Our concern always is for public safety."

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