



BJA Bureau of Justice Assistance Fact Sheet

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Stopping Hate Crime: A Case History From the Sacramento Police Department

Hate crime has struck fear in communities across America. In 1995 alone, nearly 8,000 incidents nationwide were reported to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); 61 percent of those violent acts were motivated by racial bias. This fact sheet reports the experiences of one community's battle to stop hate crime. It is based on a report submitted to the Bureau of Justice Assistance by the Sacramento Police Department as part of a grant to fund hate crime prevention efforts.

Hate Crime in Sacramento, California

Between July and October 1993, four arsons and three attempted arsons committed by a self-proclaimed white separatist became the subject of intense media attention and public concern in Sacramento, California. The first incident was the attempted arson of a Jewish temple in July. A few days later, the local office of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was destroyed by fire. Neither organization had received threats prior to the attacks and no individual or organization claimed responsibility. The investigation of the NAACP arson was exhaustive but recovered little physical evidence that could identify a suspect.

After failed arson attempts in August and September, the connection between the crimes and their motivation by hate became alarmingly clear to investigators, the media, and residents of Sacramento when the arsonist used Molotov cocktails to ignite the offices of the Japanese American Citizens League and the State Office of Fair Employment and Housing as well as the home of an Asian-American city councilman. Calling himself the "Aryan Liberation Front," the arsonist telephoned

local television stations, claimed responsibility for the arsons—including the attempted arson of the Jewish temple and the burning of the NAACP offices—and warned of further attacks.

The Need for a Multiagency Task Force

By early October 1993, media coverage of the arsonist had stirred widespread public fear, putting intense pressure on local, State, and Federal officials to stop the burnings. An informal team of investigators was formed following the first incidents (comprising detectives and patrol officers from the Sacramento Police Department, one FBI agent, lab technicians from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), and arson investigators from the Sacramento Fire Department), but it lacked the resources and strategic direction to respond aggressively to the escalating situation.

As the seriousness of the crimes became clear in the second wave of arsons, local, State, and Federal officials publicly committed to bringing more resources to bear in the investigation. The investigation now enjoyed the support of officials from every level of government, but their conflicting demands on local police investigators began to fracture the investigation's focus. To be effective, the Sacramento Police Department concluded, those resources had to be funneled through an official task force on hate crime directed by a strong local command.

Command of the task force's tactical field personnel was delegated to an operations lieutenant within the Sacramento Police Department. He designed a response

plan in consultation with other members of the task force that included surveillance of potential targets and deployment of tactical field teams to respond to new crimes and fleeing suspects.

The task force developed a suspect profile of the arsonist from locations he targeted, witness statements, and recordings of his voice. In November 1993, using the profile to conduct a computer search of white supremacists in the Sacramento area and information from a juvenile hall inmate, Sacramento police located and arrested an 18-year-old white male. Cloth found at the suspect's home matched wicks recovered from several arson crime scenes and analyzed in the FBI's crime lab. The suspect was later convicted on all counts of hate-motivated arson.

The quick arrest of a suspect once the task force began a concerted operation under the leadership of the Sacramento Police Department showed conclusively that the department's partnership with Federal agencies on or supporting the task force dramatically improved its ability to investigate hate crime. The search for a suspect benefited greatly from having immediate access to the Nation's most sophisticated crime laboratories and databases. Federal assistance has also significantly enhanced the Sacramento Police Department's monitoring of hate crime suspects—an important new law enforcement tool for local investigators that will prevent hate crime in the future.

Recommendations to Other Communities Fighting Hate Crime

The pitfalls and successes of investigating hate crime experienced by Sacramento police investigators and their Federal, State, and local task force partners are common to law enforcement agencies across the Nation. The following recommendations are offered by the Sacramento Police Department in the hope that they will help law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve respond more forcefully to hate crime and use every resource at their disposal to prevent its occurrence.

- ❑ Train every patrol officer in the department to recognize hate crime. Patrol officers must understand and support a department's policies on hate crime and know how to respond when hate crime occurs.
- ❑ Establish a multiagency task force in areas where hate crime occurs and give it the full support of every elected official and law enforcement agency involved in the investigation and prosecution of

hate crime. With more experienced personnel and dedicated equipment, a task force can investigate incidents and leads more quickly than can a team assembled ad hoc. It can deploy more tactical units to protect potential targets of attacks and implement strategies to stop perpetrators of hate crime before they strike again.

- ❑ Seek out every source of State and Federal law enforcement assistance in your community and make it available to the task force. In Sacramento, the strong commitment made by local, State, and Federal agencies in 1993 to collaborate on hate crime prevention has been the foundation of that community's aggressive response to hate crime. For example:
 - The Sacramento Police Department used a \$100,000 grant from the *Bureau of Justice Assistance* to deploy a sophisticated vehicle that permits close yet covert surveillance of hate crime suspects. The department also purchased a geographical information system with BJA grant money that has become an indispensable visual aid for tactical commanders and their personnel. Task force investigators use the system to target locations and select areas of responsibility.
 - The *Federal Bureau of Investigation* made significant contributions to the 1993 Sacramento investigation by canvassing crime scene areas for witnesses, conducting out-of-town and out-of-State interviews, providing technical assistance on tracing telephone calls and acquiring other telephone information, and analyzing physical evidence in the FBI laboratory.
 - The office of the *California Attorney General* analyzed the Sacramento arsons using a computer program and provided the task force with names of possible suspects.
 - *DOJ* investigators supporting the Sacramento task force conducted out-of-State interviews and monitored calls made by the arsonist to local television stations.
 - The *Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms* contributed expert arson investigators to the task force, who examined arson scenes, collected evidence, and conducted state-of-the-art laboratory analysis.
- ❑ Encourage the participation of the community in the investigation. Hate crimes outrage community members as few events can. Used constructively,

the desire of community- and neighborhood-based groups to apprehend the perpetrators of hate crime can be a powerful asset for law enforcement. Volunteers in Sacramento donated their time and resources to investigate suspicious activity, control rumors, and post an award for information on the case.

- ❑ Implement a tactical deployment plan immediately once investigators believe a suspect or organization will continue to commit hate crimes. The plan's most important objectives should be to identify possible suspects, prevent further crime, and apprehend the individual or group during an overt criminal act.
- ❑ Protect the task force's investigative resources from intrusion by high-level personnel who are not leading the investigation. All input into an investigation from other agencies should flow through the task force coordinator. Dedicate alternative resources to investigating questionable leads.
- ❑ Maintain the same tactical personnel on the task force. The principal difficulty reported by the tactical commander of the task force in Sacramento was the time and energy he was forced to devote to daily briefings of newly assigned personnel. The constant changing of personnel also hurt the investigation by diminishing officers' insight into the suspect's behavior.
- ❑ Ensure that firefighters make every effort to protect an arson's point of origin. The loss of evidence in the NAACP fire prompted the Sacramento Police Department to establish protocols with the Sacramento Fire Department to preserve future arson crime scenes for inspection by its arson investigators, the State fire marshal, and ATF arson experts.
- ❑ Instruct officers arriving at the scene of a hate crime to conduct an immediate search for victims and witnesses to the crime. The quality of information collected during the early stages of an investigation will greatly aid or hinder the success of followup investigations.

- ❑ Select an individual to lead the task force who, in addition to being a superior tactical commander, is comfortable working with the media and sensitive to the concerns of community members most threatened by hate violence.
- ❑ Use community programs to raise public awareness of hate crime and the individuals who commit it. Presentations to youth can help them understand when they are victims of hate crime and when they are engaging in criminal acts.

For More Information

Publications and information on hate crime and community law enforcement partnerships are available from the Bureau of Justice Assistance. To order them or to find out about BJA-funded programs, contact these offices:

Bureau of Justice Assistance Clearinghouse

P.O. Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849-6000
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World Wide Web: <http://www.ncjrs.org>

Clearinghouse staff are available Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. eastern time. Ask them to place you on the BJA mailing list.

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