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Law Enforcement BULLETIN

Features

Departments

Community-Oriented Policing
A Blend of Strategies

By
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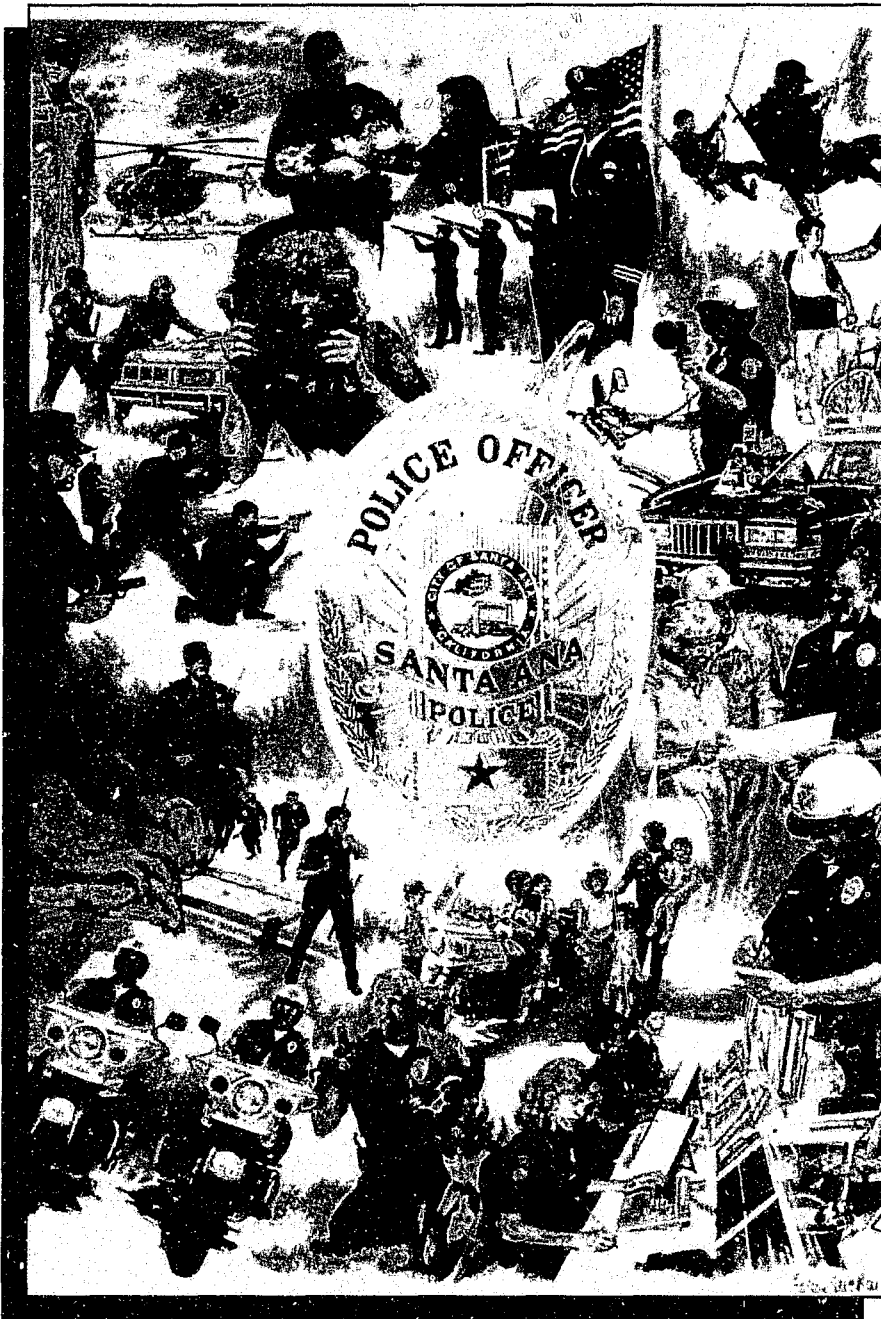
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Throughout the country, law enforcement personnel debate the virtues of traditional policing versus crime prevention through problem solving. On the one hand, the traditional approach to policing emphasizes swift police response to incidents. On the other hand, the more proactive approach of problem-oriented policing stresses the long-term benefits of crime prevention.

Although both of these approaches have merit, the reality is that with the complex crime problems facing society today, law enforcement administrators need to synthesize the two strategies into a comprehensive response to crime. Both approaches—swift police response to incidents and disorder and problem-oriented policing— are critical to serving communities in a balanced manner. The combination of these two law enforcement strategies provides an even more dynamic form of law enforcement—community-oriented policing (COP).

This article discusses community-oriented policing and how to achieve a balance between the two strategies used in this type of policing. It also discusses how to implement such a plan.

LAYING A FOUNDATION

Before departments can successfully implement community-oriented policing, managers must

lay a foundation by ensuring that a high level of police credibility exists within the community. To accomplish this, all police response to community needs—whether reactive or proactive—must meet the most stringent standards of discipline and professionalism. Police administrators can ensure that their officers respond in this manner through careful personnel selection and training, especially in the area of police discretion.

When officers continually conduct their duties in a highly professional manner, managers can allow a wide latitude of officer discretion. However, maintaining wide latitude, while continuing to enjoy the respect and cooperation of the community, requires that each officer be personally accountable for the highest standards of professional behavior. If any officer fails in this regard, all officers suffer the consequences of low community confidence in the police.

Citizen confidence in the police sets the stage for instituting the two police strategies embodied in community-oriented policing—response to incidents and problem-oriented policing. Neither strategy takes precedence over the other, and neither can be fully successful without the other. Clearly, the combination of both strategies helps law enforcement achieve its goals by synthesizing two different approaches.

COP STRATEGIES

Response to Incidents

Response to incidents (R2I) requires law enforcement officers to react to crimes or emergency incidents. In order to promote citizen confidence in the police, officers should swiftly respond to any such incidents and establish and maintain control over the situation.

R2I also requires officers to respond proactively to crime patterns. This is accomplished through such tactics as directed patrol, targeted identifications, etc.

However, if police administrators do not carefully manage the R2I strategy, their departments can quickly be overwhelmed by community demands. In order to manage increased calls for police service, administrators need to monitor demand and then research as many creative ways as possible to respond to these calls.

There are many ways to respond to calls for assistance that do not require the immediate dispatching of an officer in a patrol car. Other, less expensive responses may satisfy the request just as effectively. In fact, only a small percentage of calls require urgent police response. For example, many departments dispatch officers to burglary scenes to take a report. At the same time, they dispatch a technician to the scene to collect evidence. A more efficient way to handle such calls is to have an officer take a telephonic report and dispatch the technician to the scene to collect evidence.

Another way to better serve jurisdictions using the R2I strategy is to invest in current technology in such areas as communications, information, case management and analysis, and transportation. Current technology may include automated mug systems, records management and retrieval systems, automated aging systems, and mobile data terminals. Department managers must then use all their resources, both technological and human, in a balanced way that produces not just activity but also results—results that they can measure against their mission statements.

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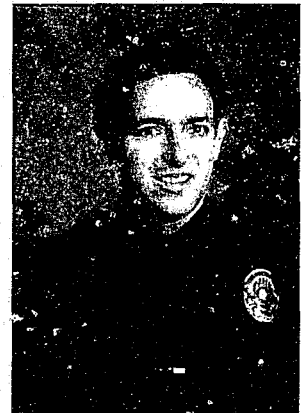
Chief Walters heads the Santa Ana, California, Police Department.

Managing the limited resources of departments to respond effectively to both incidents and calls for service, while producing the greatest advantage for their communities, requires managers to make informed, professional decisions. And, while managers must ensure that officers can respond rapidly to incidents—using the R2I strategy—they cannot rely on this strategy alone. Instead, they must balance the R2I strategy with the problem-solving strategy—problem-oriented policing.

Problem-Oriented Policing

At the heart of the problem-oriented policing (POP) approach is the concept that police must be more responsive to the *causes* of crime, rather than merely dealing with the results of crime. Maintaining neighborhood safety can be more beneficial to the community than merely treating isolated neighborhood problems. This approach represents a significant shift in how both the public and the police view the role of law enforcement in the community.

Problem-oriented policing is a proactive, decentralized approach to providing police services designed to reduce crime and disorder, and by extension, the fear of crime. Department heads achieve this by assigning officers to specific neighborhoods on a long-term basis. Long-term involvement between the officers and neighborhood residents fosters the development of credible relationships based on mutual trust and cooperation. It also allows a high-level exchange of information between citizens and police officers, as well as mutual input concerning policing priorities and tactics for specific areas of the community.

Problem-oriented policing also distributes police services more effectively across the community and targets high-crime areas for problem-solving approaches that allow law enforcement to define and deal with the causes of crime. This helps to neutralize the undue influence of special interest groups that can be the recipients of preferred services when no system of community-based priorities exists.

ACHIEVING A BALANCE

Officials can achieve a balance between R2I and problem-oriented policing by applying the differential police response (DPR) tactic. DPR involves the analysis of demand patterns made on the department by members of the community. After analyzing the demand patterns, officials then develop alternatives to traditional police responses—alternatives that provide improved community police services at a lower cost than traditional rapid response.

For example, if officers must frequently respond to an alarm located in a business establishment, a pattern develops. Once managers determine that a pattern exists, they can personally contact the owners of the business to determine whether there is a design problem or a defect of some type that causes the alarm to sound. This would eliminate the need for officers to respond repeatedly to the same alarm.

Once law enforcement agencies expand their range of possible responses to community needs,

managers should allocate resources to ensure the best and most comprehensive effect in the community. For this system to work, officers need to understand the comprehensive approach and act in ways that support their departments' missions. When a balance between R2I and problem-oriented policing exists, police managers can implement the community-oriented policing strategy.

IMPLEMENTING COMMUNITY-ORIENTED POLICING

Implementing community-oriented policing requires both time and a substantial effort. The Santa Ana, California, Police Department took the following steps to institute the strategy.

First, department administrators implemented community-oriented policing within the context of the city's commitment to total quality management. Then, they developed a task force of civilians and officers from all ranks to address community-oriented policing. This task force helped to guide the full implementation of this philosophy throughout the entire department. Members of the task force reviewed organizational structure, performance evaluation and reward systems, recruiting and training practices, and deployment strategies.

The next step was to create a police stakeholders task force, chaired by the chief and composed of representatives from the department and other related city agencies and community groups. This task force reviewed the criteria and values by which police functions and services to the community are evaluated in the context of community-oriented policing.

To enable swift response to emergency needs, the department installed a state-of-the-art, computer-aided dispatch system and analyzed community information in order to anticipate and prevent crime and emergencies. At the same

" Implementing community-oriented policing requires both time and a substantial effort. "

time, the department trained all departmental personnel in community-oriented policing. They then evaluated the community-oriented policing test areas within the department's jurisdiction and made recommendations for possible applications to other areas of the jurisdiction.

Finally, the architectural design of a new police department facility, which was already scheduled to be built, reflected the central functions, values, and vision of community-oriented policing. This facility represents the commitment of department administrators to the community-oriented policing strategy.

For example, unoccupied desks are available on the first floor of the facility for members of the community who work temporarily with department members to solve problems occurring within specific neighborhoods. This simple feature highlights the department's commitment to community-oriented policing.

The new facility also includes a conference room that seats 250 individuals. This will allow community members a meeting place to discuss problems they experience in their particular neighborhoods.

CONCLUSION

Today's police managers must resolve new problems within their communities through cost-effective, innovative ways. Community-oriented policing offers an interesting possibility to departments nationwide.

A combination of problem-oriented policing and the response to incidents—community oriented policing—offers a comprehensive and balanced approach to maintaining high levels of safety and security throughout neighborhoods. However, in order to ensure effectiveness, managers need to adapt the strategy to the changing demands of their jurisdictions.

All police managers must continue to review their department's effectiveness, plan new and better ways to accomplish their mission, verify the appropriateness of new methods, and take the initiative to make continuous improvements in all police activities. Only through continued evaluation and adjustment can police departments maintain the utmost effectiveness. ✦

Crime Data

Crime in the United States—1992

Final 1992 crime statistics, published in the FBI's *Crime in the United States—1992,* show that an estimated 14.4 million offenses were reported to law enforcement agencies across the Nation. This total represents an average of 5,660 crimes for every 100,000 U.S. inhabitants.

The statistics, based on a Crime Index of selected violent and property offenses reported to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, cover 95 percent of the population. Over 16,000 law enforcement agencies submitted data for 1992, and estimates are included for nonreporting areas.

Volume of Crime

Overall crime reported in 1992, as measured by the Index, was 3 percent lower than in 1991, which represents the first annual decline since 1984. The number of offenses, however, was 4 percent higher than in 1988 and 19 percent above the 1983 total.

Collectively, violent crime increased by 1 percent during 1992. The number of property crimes, however, declined 4 percent overall.

Except for the West, all regions in the Nation showed decreases in the number of offenses reported from 1991 to 1992. The Northeast registered a 6-percent decline; the Midwest, a 5-percent decline; and the South, a 3-percent decline. The West showed a less-than-1-percent increase.

Cities and suburban counties, like the Nation as a whole, each experienced a 3-percent decline in the number of Crime Index offenses reported. Rural counties registered a 1-percent decrease.

Crime Clearances

Law enforcement personnel nationwide cleared 21 percent of the Crime Index offenses recorded in 1992. The clearance rate was 45 percent for violent crimes and 18 percent for property crimes.

The highest clearance rate was for murder, at 65 percent; the lowest for burglary, at 13 percent. Offenses where offenders were all under 18 years of age resulted in 20 percent of the overall Crime Index clearances, 13 percent of the violent crime clearances, and 23 percent of the property crime clearances.

Arrests

During 1992, law enforcement personnel made an estimated 14 million arrests for all crimes other than traffic violations. The highest arrest counts were for driving under the influence, 1.6 million; larceny-theft, 1.5 million; and simple assault and drug abuse violations, each 1.1 million.

The total number of arrests in 1992 declined less than 1 percent from the previous year. Overall Crime Index arrests dropped 2 percent. Arrests for violent crimes rose by 2 percent, while property crime arrests declined 3 percent.

Of those arrested in 1992, 45 percent were under the age of 25, 81 percent were male, and 68 percent were white. Larceny-theft was the offense that resulted in the most arrests of persons under the age of 18, while adults were most often arrested for driving under the influence.