

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

**Implementing a Multi-Jurisdictional SWAT Team
for Smaller Police Agencies**

**An Administrative Research Paper
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**By
Jimmie Gregg**

**Corinth Police Department
Corinth, Texas
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ABSTRACT

Implementing multi-jurisdictional SWAT teams for smaller police agencies is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because in today's world, every agency, both big and small, need to be able to respond to a critical incident with tactics, training, and weapons, usually available only to the larger departments. Smaller agencies implementing such a team can spend less and use less of their resources to form a team to combat issues such as narcotics, violent crimes, and high-risk fugitives.

The purpose of this research is to show that implementing a multi-jurisdictional Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team for smaller agencies can be cost effective and more efficient than getting one started on their own. Another purpose is to detail how to go about forming such a team. The method of inquiry used by the researcher included: a review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals, journals, and a survey distributed to 12 survey participants.

The researcher discovered that implementing a multi-jurisdictional SWAT team for smaller police agencies is a more cost effective and efficient way for agencies serving 25,000 citizens and under to form a SWAT team. Many smaller agencies across this country believe they cannot afford or cannot staff a SWAT team. The outcome of this paper is to magnify the many issues which need to be considered and show how combining efforts can make the fruition of a SWAT team come to life for smaller police agencies.

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INTRODUCTION

The news media portrayed two masked men launching an all out assault on the citizens of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles Police Department on February 28, 1997. The intense, war-like scene was terminated by a highly trained group of officers. The officers were members of the Los Angeles Police Department's Special Weapons and Tactics Team. As Scoville (2003) defined, Special Weapons and Tactics or SWAT, is a special unit within a police department that has been trained to be experts in the use of a variety of weapons and tactics required to deal with special challenges and situations. On the one hand, a city the size of Los Angeles has no problem with financing, staffing, and training a SWAT team; resources are plentiful, and manpower is not an issue. On the other hand, many smaller agencies, specifically those under 50 officers, may have a difficult time with all of these issues. Typically, these agencies have a hard time purchasing the expensive equipment it takes to operate a SWAT team and finding enough officers to fill the team can be problematic. The concept of a multi-jurisdictional SWAT team for smaller agencies can also provide a complement to existing resources. Having a SWAT team ready to deploy for any size department is a must in today's world. The problem or issue to be examined considers whether or not implementing a multi-jurisdictional SWAT team will benefit those departments who are considering joining forces to achieve a common goal.

The relevance of implementing a multi-jurisdictional SWAT team for smaller police agencies in law enforcement is important because in today's world, every agency, both big and small, need to be able to respond to a critical incident with tactics, training, and weapons, usually available only to the larger departments. Today's law

enforcement agencies must think fiscally before all else, and this concept can help ease some of the financial burden for the smaller agencies. Budgets are much tighter for these police agencies. Issues like gas prices, insurance for employees, etc., tend to put a strain on these agencies more than larger agencies. Law enforcement executives in the smaller agencies can only rely so much on other agencies' resources.

The purpose of this research is to explore alternative ways for police agencies to handle high-risk situations or situations where a typical street cop would be ill equipped. The research question to be examined focuses on whether or not implementing a multi-jurisdictional SWAT team will be a safe, efficient, and effective concept for smaller agencies who want to deploy a SWAT team but cannot afford or man their own team. The implementation of a multi-jurisdictional SWAT team will assist in this endeavor. This paper will provide key components to consider when implementing a multi-jurisdictional SWAT team.

The researcher will gather and examine information to determine if a multi-jurisdictional SWAT team is a reasonable and realistic option for smaller police agencies, especially those under 50 officers. The intended method of inquiry includes a review of articles, internet sites, periodicals, journals, and a survey distributed to 12 survey participants. It is anticipated that implementing this concept will greatly benefit the involved departments and members of the community. The findings will give smaller agencies an alternative to a single resource department SWAT team. In the end, this concept will, ultimately, make for a more highly trained, better-equipped, and safer officer in a smaller community.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature regarding multi-jurisdictional SWAT teams is limited; however, this review will examine the related literature in this area. As more people move to the suburban “bedroom” communities, crime trends increase. Specifically, violent crime is on the rise in these bedroom communities. FBI crime reporting statistics show that crime is on the rise in suburban cities where smaller agencies typically serve. Based on data from the F.B.I. Uniform Crime Report for 2006, total suburban cities, all cities under 49,999 people, showed an increase in violent crime by 3.2%. Violent crimes reported are murder and non-negligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. Listed is a breakdown of each category and the amount it changed from 2005 to 2006: murder (+5.6%), rape (+0.9%), robbery (+10.4%), and aggravated assault (+0.7%). Violent crimes are the crimes most often heard about on the news or read about in the newspaper. They are the crimes which create fear in communities. As slight an increase as they may seem, the numbers tended to increase even in the 2007 report year. Data from the 2007 Uniform Crime Report showed a 0.4 % increase in violent crime from 2006 to 2007. During these same report years property crime showed a slight decrease. Again, it is the violent crimes which tend to change individuals perceptions about safety in their own communities.

There are many factors for the rise in the violent crime category in the suburban communities. It seems as though gangs are moving into the suburban communities at an alarming rate. One reason is due to family migration. The United States is experiencing an influx of urban migration into the suburbs. An example would be a young gang member moving from inner city Dallas to a smaller suburb of Dallas. Kids

from the small community would instantly see the former “big city” gang member as credible and the likelihood of a gang forming would be higher. This gang may commit small crimes in the beginning, but violent crime is almost a guarantee. Suburban communities throughout the nation are encountering gang-related problems, once largely confined to large cities. Data from the 2007 United States Department of Justice (USDOJ) indicated that of the 3,054 law enforcement agencies responding to their recent survey, 585 were from suburban areas reporting gang activity. Of these agencies, 506 estimated that between 1 and 500 gang members were active in their areas; the remaining 79 agencies reported that 501 or more gang members were active in their jurisdictions. Additionally, in 2007, USDOJ and local law enforcement data revealed that in 21 of these 79 suburban communities, gangs pose a serious threat to the citizens of their respected communities.

Another reason for an influx in the violent crime rate is drug dealers relocating from big cities to smaller cities. Drug dealers may feel more comfortable in the small city environment, feeling less pressure from law enforcement. Typically, a drug environment breeds violent crime. Smaller law enforcement agencies have less manpower to designate an officer to work strictly narcotics. The drug dealers know this and can usually exist in a smaller community with less heat from the police than they would in a larger city. Kraska (1999) believed that PPU’S (Police Paramilitary Unit’s) or SWAT teams are needed to combat the drug problem in this country. Kraska (1999) further argued that the drug war has to be brought indoors, meaning proactive raids on private residences are essential in fighting the drug problem. Police executives could send in regular uniformed officer teams to make entry into a residence with a narcotics

search warrant, but without proper training and equipment, this could have disastrous consequences. Without proper training on tactics and without specialized weapons, the police executive performing these types of warrant services could open themselves up to liability issues.

The recent school and church shooting incidents have occurred more often than not in the suburbs. Since the Columbine School shootings in Littleton, Colorado, administrators and chiefs can no longer ignore the fact that violence is slowly creeping into their neighborhoods and schools. The possibility of a violent crime, especially a mass shooting, is something for which every agency has to plan. Kraska (1999) stated, "We have just been provided evidence of this in Littleton, Colorado. It is better to be prepared, no matter what the odds of a disaster are, than to risk a disaster at the hands of ill-trained road patrol officers" (p. 6). Police in small towns must be ready to handle situations involving violent crimes such as a mass school shooting or shooting a church. Having a multi-jurisdictional SWAT team would prepare officers on how to respond to such incidents and would provide them with the appropriate equipment and resources.

Wilmette (2000) reported that while society seeks to make sense out of these incidents, proactive police departments are asking tough questions: "How would we respond? and "Are we ready?" (p. 75). Law enforcement executives all over the country are struggling with these very questions. There is not a police executive in this country who wants his officers to be caught in a situation where he or she does not have the tactical advantage. The department could open itself up for lawsuits for negligence in certain situations. If a department can articulate why it needs a SWAT team and an officer is killed or injured due to a high risk incident, a lawsuit would likely

be the outcome. Scoville (1997) cited the importance in this matter by noting that a 1982 court ruled the Anchorage, Alaska Police Department liable for a suspect's death because the department did not have a SWAT team. To protect officers, community members, and suspects, departments need to consider having a SWAT team.

Agencies under 50 officers who decide to form a SWAT team on their own face many obstacles. Scoville (1997) found that an effective SWAT team usually consists of 21 officers. The team consists of an entry team, secondary entry team, snipers, and perimeter team. A commander is also an essential piece of the puzzle. Scoville (1997) cited, "there should be no question that the right type and size of SWAT team for your area has been chosen" (p. 31). Compromising on the number of officers to build a team on could affect the mission and safety of the involved officers. There are not many agencies under 50 officers across the United States that can afford to man a 21 officer SWAT team. If departments utilized the multi-jurisdictional concept they will be sharing officers and can combat the manpower issue. The next and most expensive task is that of purchasing equipment and weapons for the team. Items to be purchased include: entry vests, assault rifles, ammunition, shields, helmets, nomex gloves and hoods, uniforms, communications equipment, boots, entry tools, and transportation. On average, the initial start up cost per officer is anywhere from \$6,000 to \$7,000. A financial commitment from all involved departments must be there in order for this team to work. All of the material researched followed the consensus that if the agency was not willing to spend extra money then the SWAT program would not be successful and could, in many ways, be a liability. The simple fact is that the SWAT team is a budget depleting endeavor, and if administration does not support it 100%, it should not be

sought after. The result of not putting 100% into the financial aspect of the team could result in serious injury or death to the involved officers.

The next step in creating a SWAT team is the actual selection of the officers who will fill the team. It is critical to select the right people to make the team successful. The test for SWAT officer positions consists of many rigorous tests including, but not limited to, obstacle courses, physicals, marksmanship courses, judgment tests, self-discipline exercises, written tests, and oral review boards. A special type of person must be selected to fill the positions for the SWAT team to be effective. A leader or commander must also be selected. The researcher believes this is one of the most critical elements when putting together a SWAT team. The team takes on the characteristics of its leader. If the team has a weak leader, the team will reflect such leadership. Green (1997) asserted, "The confidence that team members place on their commander can never be appointed, but must be earned. These attributes are found in the most successful teams, both in the members and their commanders" (p. 100). This comment reiterates the importance of strong leadership, especially when starting a SWAT team. With strong leadership comes a strong team.

Agencies under 50 officers will have a hard time reaching the aforementioned listed requirements to form their own SWAT team. Some of the findings proved the implementation of a multi-jurisdictional SWAT team would be the most effective for all of the departments involved. A particular article found stated that the hardest part of the formation process is selling the idea to the involved chiefs. Green (1997) stated, "one of the selling points is the immediate response and containment function of specially trained officers" (p. 69). Not to say that all chiefs struggle with power issues but in order

to effectively run a multi-jurisdictional SWAT team, the involved chiefs must relent some of their power for the “whole.” If even one chief decides to not play by the rules, then trust could be lost, and the team would not be successful and, in fact, would fail in the long run. This is a minute issue; however, it is an issue which could destroy the concept before its inception.

Once the concept has been approved by the involved departments, the selection process may begin. The literature suggested the involved departments draw up a contract and write up a policy. The involved departments may also draw up jurisdictional boundaries. Green (1997) also considered issues of determining who will take care of worker’s compensation claims if an officer gets injured in another jurisdiction. These are issues that must be thought of and handled long before the training begins. Green (1997) presented another topic that may be overlooked by executives during the planning process. All involved officers need to have the same or similar uniforms. Green (1997) mentioned that “ease of recognition must occur, as it can be fatal to not be able to recognize team members during a critical incident if all members are wearing something different” (p. 71). Though it is another expense to the involved agencies, it is imperative similar uniforms are purchased. Also, members should be required to carry the same type of weapons. SWAT officers need to carry the same caliber of weapons just in case of a weapon malfunction, or if an officer is down, a fellow officer can use the downed officer’s weapon and be familiar with how it works.

As mentioned above, the implementation process will not be easy nor will it be cheap for the involved departments. Many hours of preparation and oversight will be put in when implementing this concept. Policies and procedures will be written and

explored, and it may take time for the involved departments to agree on them. However painstaking the process may be, the implementation may be of great value one day.

METHODOLOGY

The research question to be examined considers whether or not a multi-jurisdictional SWAT team for agencies under 50 officers would be an effective and efficient concept. The researcher hypothesizes that law enforcement executives of agencies under 50 officers would be very responsive toward this concept and would be willing to implement such a team. The method of inquiry will include a review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals, journals, and a survey distributed to 12 survey participants. The instrument that will be used to measure the researcher's findings regarding the subject of implementing a multi-jurisdictional SWAT team for agencies under 50 officers will include a survey.

The size of the survey will consist of six questions, distributed to 12 survey participants from the Dallas/Ft. Worth Metroplex. The response rate to the survey instrument resulted in eight respondents out of a possible 12. The information obtained from the survey will be analyzed by the researcher. Some of the questions on the survey will be whether they agree with the concept of the multi-jurisdictional SWAT team or not. The questions will be broken down even further to include the following topics: purchasing equipment, leadership issues, training, uniforms, worker's compensation/injuries, policies, and overall concerns they have with the concept of the multi-jurisdictional SWAT team. The survey will also ask for input in trying to find ways of developing procedures and policies for a multi-jurisdictional SWAT team.

FINDINGS

The researcher sent out 12 surveys to 12 different agencies that all have 50 or less officers. Eight surveys were returned and were completed thoroughly. The surveys were addressed to the Chief of Police. The surveys were sent with the understanding that the findings would not mention any particular departments or chief's names.

The first question on the survey asked if the chief would consider implementing a multi-jurisdictional SWAT team if a surrounding agency showed interest in one. Out of the eight returned surveys, four said they would allow their department to participate. One chief responded with maybe, and the other three said they would not participate.

The next question asked what would be a major concern when considering a multi-jurisdictional SWAT team. Four of the respondents said their major concern was with leadership issues. They were concerned with who would ultimately have the final say when it came down to make a critical decision. So, half of the respondents were concerned with who is going to be in control. One respondent was concerned with budgetary constraints, especially when dealing with overtime and compensation time issues. Another chief's concern was liability and injury issues. Another survey returned said they were concerned with a lack of hiring protocol by surrounding agencies. The chief was worried the other agency would have lower standards when hiring or picking individuals for the team. Finally, another chief's worry was that of the actual response time of the team due to it involving multiple agencies.

The next question on the survey asked how many officers the chief would be willing to devote to a multi-jurisdictional SWAT team. Two of the respondents said they

would assign no officers to a team. One respondent said they would allow 6-8 officers on a team, and the remaining chiefs said they would allow two officers to be on the team.

The fourth question on the survey asked a question about whether departments with less than 50 officers should consider a SWAT team or rely on a larger agency to handle their critical incidents for them. Five of the respondents believed a SWAT team is a necessity for their sized departments. One responded by saying the team should be considered as funding/personnel allow. Another respondent said that larger agencies (over 50 officers) tend to have more resources available to them, and they are better organized and equipped for a SWAT team. The final survey said the smaller agency should have a SWAT team to handle hazardous type warrants but should rely on a larger department when exigent circumstances arise.

Another question asked the respondent if he or she would grant compensatory time for training. Five advised that they would grant the compensatory time. The other two said they would not. The two who did not agree with the concept of the multi-jurisdictional SWAT team denied giving compensatory time for the training of such team.

The last question asked was broken into subtopics. The survey asked the respondent to give his or her thoughts and opinions on several different topics about whether or not he agreed with the concept of a multi-jurisdictional SWAT team or not. The topics are listed as follows: leadership, training, workers compensation/injury issues, policy/procedures and equipment procurement. When asked who should be the leader of the team should be, five responded by saying it was an assignment that had to

be done by all involved administrations. These five respondents believed it was highly important for the command staff to select the best person based on qualifications.

Another respondent said they believed the leader of the team should be the officer's whose jurisdiction was the location of the incident. The last respondent said that one agency should be in control of the entire outfit.

When answering the question about training, six of the chiefs said the training must be done at least once a month. The hours varied from 8 to 16 hours of training per month. The other two respondents said training should include input from all agencies involved. The question dealing with workers compensation/injury to officer was answered the same by all of the respondents. All said that the officers' own agency would handle the injury claim, and an inter-local agreement should be drawn up prior to cover this issue.

A tough question which needs to be tackled in order for this concept to work is that of the policy and procedures. The respondents all agreed on this issue as well. All said the policy must be drawn up and agreed upon by all involved agencies. A couple of respondents even added that a board or panel would need to be formed in order to accomplish this. It is safe to say all respondents agreed on this topic. The final question asked how to deal with equipment procurement. Two of the respondents said to go after grants and or local business donations. The other six respondents agreed that the individual agency would outfit or equip their own personnel. They also wanted to see the costs shared by all involved agencies for larger items and then broken down into a percentage based on the number of team members and size of the department involved.

DISCUSSIONS/CONCLUSIONS

The problem or issue examined by the researcher considered whether or not implementing a multi-jurisdictional SWAT team for agencies under 50 officers would be a effective and efficient option for interested agencies. The purpose of this research was to explore alternative ways for police agencies to handle high-risk situations or situations where a typical street cop would be ill-equipped. The implementation of a multi-jurisdictional SWAT team will assist in this endeavor. The research question that was examined focused on providing the citizens of smaller communities the same type of service larger agencies can afford and equip when it comes to SWAT teams. The paper also focused on how the smaller agencies can reach their goal of implementing a multi-jurisdictional SWAT team.

The researcher hypothesized that law enforcement executives of agencies under 50 officers would be very responsive toward this concept and would be willing to implement such a team. The researcher concluded from the findings that implementing a multi-jurisdictional SWAT team for agencies under 50 officers can give smaller departments an alternative to a single resource department SWAT team. Implementing a multi-jurisdictional SWAT team has many rewards for the involved departments.

Small departments who combine to form such a team will benefit in many ways. First, these agencies will all save money. The agencies can all share the costs when it comes to equipment, training, and pay. With today's economy being so bad, this is certainly a concern for administrators and decision makers in the department. Secondly, the talent pool to select officers from is much larger. Smaller departments may not have enough qualified officers for a SWAT team if acting independently. When

combining personnel, the chances of finding eligible officers increase dramatically. Finally, all of the agencies combined have now answered the problem of critical incident situations and determined how to handle them. These agencies now have a way to not rely on an outside agency alone for help in critical incidents. As mentioned before, time is of the essence when dealing with a critical incident. In the end, this concept will ultimately make for a more highly trained, better equipped, and safer officer in agencies under 50 officers.

The findings of the research did support the hypothesis. The reasons why the findings did support the hypothesis are probably due to the necessity of every department needing a SWAT team prepared and ready to act. Times have changed from the days of just large metropolitan cities seeing violent crimes and gangs. Also, as more and more mass shootings occur in suburban neighborhoods, so goes the need for a SWAT team. Administrators of agencies under 50 officers across the country are seeing the need for and are looking for alternative ways of funding, equipping, and manning these teams.

Limitations that might have hindered this study resulted because of a lack of multi-jurisdictional teams out there. Another hindrance was due to only receiving eight out of the 12 surveys back. The study of implementing multi-jurisdictional SWAT teams in agencies under 50 officers is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because agencies today are trying to find ways to save money and also provide the necessary services to their respected communities. Agencies under 50 officers who are looking to implement a SWAT team and the citizens they serve stand to benefit by the results of this research.

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APPENDIX

Research Paper Survey

Sgt. J. Gregg #210

1. Would you consider implementing a multi-jurisdictional swat team if a surrounding agency was interested?

2. What would be a major concern when considering a multi-jurisdictional swat team?

3. How many officers would you be willing to devote to a multi-jurisdictional swat team?

4. Do you think departments with less than 50 officers should consider a swat team or an emergency response team or should they rely on a larger agency to handle situations which may arise?

5. Would you be willing to grant your officers compensatory time in order to train as a member of a multi-jurisdictional swat team?

6. Whether you agree with this theory or not please give me your thoughts on how you would handle the below listed issues when considering a multi-jurisdictional swat team:

(a.) Leadership (who is in control?):

(b.) Uniforms:

(c.) Training:

(d.) Workers comp./injury issues (if officer is injured outside of their city):

(e.) Policy/Procedures:

(f.) Equipment procurement:

Thank you for taking time out of your busy day to help me with completing my research paper. Your thoughts and ideas will be of great assistance to me. I have included a self-addressed and stamped envelope so you may return the survey back to me. Thank you again.

Sgt. J. Gregg #210
Corinth Police Department
940 390-4306