

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

CITIZEN PATROL

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ABSTRACT

Law enforcement agencies are often scrutinized by the residents of their community for being unable to prevent crime in their neighborhoods. Manpower shortages are often blamed for the lack of police coverage. Citizen on Patrol (COP) programs are used by many agencies to supplement their uniformed patrol force. Civilian volunteers can be assigned various tasks that do not need to be handled by a patrol officer. Redirecting such tasks to civilian personnel will free the countless man-hours that patrol officers can spend being proactive in their daily patrols. Data obtained from surveys, personal interviews and the observations of existing programs was used to determine if a COP program would be effective in a smaller agency. Some agencies have great success with civilian volunteers. However, other agencies lack the resources needed to develop community interest. For this research, successful COP programs from large agencies were examined to determine if the structure of their program has similarities to the structure of COP programs of smaller agencies. The research reveals that agency size does not influence the effectiveness of COP programs. It is determined that training must be provided for the volunteers, a policy manual needs to be developed, and thorough background checks need to be performed in order to reduce agency liability. A Citizen Patrol Program can be an effective way of supplementing a uniformed patrol force if there is a need within the community, an interest from the citizens, and the support of the law enforcement agency.

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INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement agencies are often scrutinized by residents of their community for being unable to prevent crime in their neighborhoods. The incidents that most frequently trigger such a response are property crimes such as thefts, criminal mischief, and burglaries. Residents are quick to blame the law enforcement agency, but do very little as far as personal involvement. A common way of promoting citizen involvement by law enforcement agencies is to offer interactive programs such as a citizen patrol. Many agencies are suffering from manpower shortages due to growth within their demographic areas or other factors that have influenced staffing needs.

The purpose of the research is to identify whether or not a citizen patrol program is an effective way to compliment the uniformed patrol force of smaller police departments. Residents in most communities expect to see patrols in their neighborhoods. They correlate patrol visibility with the reduction of crime. It is important to consider whether or not a citizen patrol will be an acceptable alternative in order to relieve the workload from police patrols.

Multiple information sources are utilized to contribute to this research such as sample surveys (LEMIT class # 66, Module 1). Previous research on this topic will be reviewed in order to determine what issues were addressed in the 1980s, 1990s and today. Interviews with agency administrators from other agencies, and citizen input from the City of Schertz, Texas, will also be used. The findings of this research will be used to recommend the most suitable course of action in regards to the effectiveness of

a citizen patrol program for the City of Schertz, Texas and any other jurisdiction looking at implementing a citizen patrol.

The research will determine if a citizen's patrol program can be a beneficial way to compliment a small police agency's patrol needs. Various topics of consideration will be brought forth by this research. These topics need to be addressed by agencies considering the implementation of a citizen patrol program in order to determine if the program will work for their agency. The research will also determine if residents accept a citizen patrol program. Additionally, the research will determine if there is an interest among these residents to actively support and participate in the program.

Ideally, any law enforcement agency contemplating the development of a community supported and staffed patrol program will benefit from this research. Insight will be gained on how to implement the program and what commitment is needed from the residents as well as the agency in order to determine if the program is feasible for the community.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Citizen involvement is recognized by many police agencies as a beneficial means of supplementing their patrol force yet, there are an even greater number of police agencies that have little or no community involvement. Without debate, it is more beneficial to have residents within a community on the side of law enforcement than against it. Among the more effective deterrents to criminal activity is visibility and those in the best position to notice unusual activities in a neighborhood are those who live there (Cox, 1996). Unless a police officer is assigned to a small district that is patrolled frequently the officer may not recognize people, vehicles or activities that a resident within that community will immediately determine to be suspicious or out of place. The

most successful patrols are those with a well-defined purpose (Jordan, 1996). Civilian patrols have become a popular alternative to passive watching. Citizen patrols have a long history that predates the creation of organized law enforcement and includes a period of vigilantism in the United States (Kenney, 1989). We have come a long way from vigilantism. Civilian patrols have evolved into well-structured citizen groups that are monitored by their local law enforcement agencies.

The Windcrest Police Department's citizen patrol organization was started thirty years ago. Unlike many volunteer patrol programs, this program was created by citizens and later became affiliated with the police department. In the fall of 1976, a series of robberies in the City of Windcrest inspired a group of Windcrest homeowners to form a Citizens' Security Awareness Patrol. Its purpose was to assist the small police force by patrolling the city and using their citizen band radios to report suspicious incidents to City Hall (Anonymous, 1995). Most agencies use a member of their police patrol force to act as a liaison to their civilian patrol force. The liaison officer can oversee and guide the civilians to work within the mission set forth by an agency and forward any concerns from the civilians to the agency's administrators for resolution.

The San Antonio, Texas Police Department's Citizen on Patrol (COP) program was started in 1993 and has over 6,500 trained volunteers (Berkowitz, 2006). This seems to be an overwhelming number when you consider that the San Antonio Police Department only has approximately 2,000 sworn officers. The Fort Worth COP program has over 2600 active volunteers (Fort, 2006). COP volunteers in larger agencies are used to enforce handicap parking violations and issue citations for these infractions. Revenue is now generated by unpaid civilians to assist with necessary enforcement

action which frees up many man-hours for patrol officers. Robert Ashley, Civilian Coordinator for the Garden Ridge Police Department's COP program, states they currently have approximately 22 active volunteers and members are still being recruited. This is a large number for a small agency that only has ten sworn officers (R. Ashley, personal communication, October 5, 2006). Deputy Chief J. Pabon mentions that the Windcrest Police Department (with seventeen sworn officers) has over 150 volunteers in their COP program (J. Pabon, personal communication, October 6, 2006). Smaller agencies may rely on their COP volunteers strictly as an extra set of eyes and ears.

This research will consider how a law enforcement agency recruits citizens to volunteer their time, and how an agency will know if certain citizens will represent themselves according to community and departmental expectations. The current trend is to provide citizens the opportunity to attend a Citizens Police Academy where they are educated regarding the role of their local law enforcement officers. This is important since different agencies have different needs and priorities that are established by community demands and expectations.

Citizen Police Academies are not designed to make police officers out of citizens or to extend their legal authority beyond that of a citizen. Many attend solely to enhance their knowledge of the agency that serves them. Others, have a desire to give back to the community and choose to attend regularly scheduled Citizen Police Academy Alumni Association meetings. This is an excellent resource for recruiting potential members for a citizen patrol program (Jordan, 1996). This is also true for large agencies like San Antonio (with 2000 plus officers) and small agencies such as Garden Ridge (with only ten officers).

The Cicero Police Department in New York has a group of citizens called the Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS). This group goes beyond just patrolling the streets. Volunteers perform residential security checks (for residents on vacation), business security checks (after closing hours) and traffic control (for special events). Volunteers also perform duties which include assistance with: vehicle accidents and other emergencies, crime prevention and community awareness programs, bicycle registrations, children fingerprinting, neighborhood watch activities, conducting a neighborhood canvas when a crime has occurred in the area, routine neighborhood patrolling, and other activities as assigned. All volunteers receive 25 hours of classroom training, covering basic skills such as: local and state laws, the use of force laws, patrol and traffic control techniques, report writing and crime prevention programs (Cicero, 2006). Since the trend in law enforcement is gauged toward community oriented policing, it is difficult for agencies with large call volumes to fit this mold. Officers are in a reactionary mode where they jump from call to call with very little time to interact with the public in a proactive manner. When volunteers can be used to help reduce the patrol officer's call volume, the patrol officers are afforded the opportunity to once again interact with the public.

An organization such as the National Association Citizens on Patrol (NACOP) offers a guide for police agencies and community organizations on how to start a citizen patrol organization. The NACOP also provides a sample policy manual that can be tailored to fit the needs of communities of various sizes and demographics. Volunteers generally come from one of the following groups: homemakers with few responsibilities, active retirees, working class with spare time on weekends and evenings, and young

adults looking for job experience (Seago, 2003). Studies reveal that those who participate in volunteer organizations are usually middle or upper-middle class, homeowners, middle-aged, educated, and married with children (Kenney, 1989). Younger adults are too often focused on college, social activities, or starting a career where the upper-middle class homeowner with a family has a vested interest in protecting the community that he/she lives in. An area that is predominantly commercial, with few established residents, more than likely will not have the resident base suited to fill the shoes of a citizen volunteer.

Excellent sources for recruitment are homeowners associations and neighborhood groups. Members of homeowners associations and neighborhood groups have already expressed an interest in protecting their community by becoming member of their association. The next logical step is to take their interest to an agency level such as a Citizens Police Academy where they can learn what their local law enforcement agency's role is in the community. This form of recruitment can also serve as a screening process for the agency in order to do background checks before applicants will be accepted. Graduates can then be recruited to the COP program.

METHODOLOGY

Is a citizen patrol program an effective way to compliment the uniformed patrol force of smaller police departments? Research indicates that law enforcement agencies are not utilizing civilian volunteers to their potential (Seago, 2003). It is evident from the large number of volunteers compared to the number of officers that some agencies have that citizens want to be an active part of their community. It is hypothesized that effective citizen patrol programs are largely dependant on community

interest in order to be effective and not on agency needs. Once a program has been established, its membership should continue to increase in numbers by word-of-mouth or by the curiosity generated by citizen patrols when they are actively patrolling neighborhoods.

A survey will be distributed to the LEMIT class # 66, Module 1, in order to determine which agencies represented have a citizen patrol program and whether or not it is effective (Appendix 1). Since agencies of various sizes will be represented in the LEMIT class, the survey data will also include the agency size based on the number of sworn officers. The author believes that this information is important to determine if agencies of a certain size have a greater success rate with citizen volunteers.

Data will be collected from the Schertz Police Department before and during the inception of their Citizen Patrol program. The police administration will be addressed in order to determine if such a program would receive support from them as well as city officials. The Schertz Citizen Police Academy Alumni Association (SCPAAA) will then be contacted to determine if enough members are interested in being the pioneers for a citizen patrol program. The SCPAAA has been in existence for approximately fifteen years. Graduates of the Citizen Police Academy are automatically members of the SCPAAA. Even though there were a fair number of graduates, few chose to be active in the Alumni Association, attend meetings, or volunteer their time.

Neighboring agencies with COP programs will also be contacted in order to determine how their programs are run, structured and supervised. Information will be obtained on recommended training topics in order to arm COP members with the necessary knowledge to be effective in the community.

FINDINGS

During this research, it was determined that agencies with citizen patrol programs generally found them to be an effective resource. These agencies use citizen volunteers to their benefit by providing an assortment of duties, which reduces the workload placed on the uniformed patrol force. Duties for the majority of the COP programs are virtually the same. They patrol neighborhoods, check businesses after hours, assist with traffic control during accidents, provide courtesy rides to stranded motorists, provide community services during special events, and many other duties that may be assigned.

When a survey was conducted during the LEMIT class it revealed that the majority of the agencies, which are represented, do not have a citizen patrol program. One hundred percent of the agencies represented in the surveyed LEMIT class responded to the survey. Based on this data, sixteen out of twenty-two agencies does not have a COP program and only four showed to be effective (Appendix 2). It is interesting to note that out of the sixteen agencies that do not have a COP program, fourteen survey responses indicated that they felt it would be a beneficial program (Appendix 3).

Effective citizen patrol programs are not linked to agencies of any specific size. There are large agencies with thousands of volunteers as well as small agencies that only reach single digits. The number of volunteers in larger agencies is obviously much greater but the number of volunteers has a direct correlation with the number of officers. Established programs have citizen volunteers that outnumber officers two or three to one. Large agencies also have a more diverse list of available duty assignments for

their volunteers. Some are used to make phone contact with complainants or witnesses and assist in gathering data for reports where small agencies strictly use volunteers as extra eyes and ears in a patrol capacity. COP programs can be created in two ways. Citizens can establish a program and then present it to their local law enforcement agency to be adopted or the agency can establish a program and recruit interested volunteers that meet the requirements.

Almost all agencies that have a webpage on the Internet for their citizen patrol program also have a Citizen Police Academy that is used as a recruiting base for new citizen patrol members. The sites list the diverse functions of the volunteers. Photos show volunteers in action during their varied functions. These sites usually elaborate on the history of the program and also provided an application for interested citizens that can either be filled out on the computer or printed out. Making an application available (that can be sent via computer) can be of a great benefit since the applicant's data, including contact information, becomes available to the recruiter. Communication can now take place between the recruiter and the applicant to maintain the applicant's interest in the academy until the starting date. Applicants required to mail or hand deliver their applications may procrastinate or lose interest before they submit their information to the recruiting officer.

The National Association Citizens on Patrol provides an excellent foundation for new and existing COP programs. The research data that was generated by the surveys, interviews and publications revealed that agencies with COP programs had policies and operational guides that regulated the operation of these programs. It is interesting to note that the Windcrest Police Department with its 150 plus members

does not have a policy for their COP program of thirty years. It is unknown why a policy was never implemented. Since their program was not initially organized within the police department and is coordinated by a citizen volunteer, it is possible that a need for a policy has not surfaced. For vicarious liability reasons, policies need to be implemented for the COP programs. This is especially important if city equipment such as vehicles is used. Another need for a policy is if the volunteers report to the Police Department, directly communicate with the dispatcher during their patrols, or simply if this is a Police Department or City sponsored program. Another important consideration is the provisions set forth in the City's Employee Handbook. Volunteers need to adhere to the same regulations as paid employees. Some agencies may have specific procedures set aside for fleet accidents that may include submitting to a drug-screen.

Before the Schertz Police Department allowed their citizen volunteers to actively patrol the streets a sample COP policy was given to all the members to review and tailor it according to what they thought was needed. During several subsequent meetings between the citizen volunteers and police administrators the sample policy evolved into a formal policy manual (Appendix 4) developed from the thoughts and ideas that were submitted by the members. The Schertz Police administrative role was to structure the policy so that it would not conflict with provisions of other police or city rules, policies, and handbooks. It was also their role to include and outline the drug-screening requirement that city personnel must submit to if involved in a fleet accident. Additionally, it was important to reduce liability for the Schertz Police Department and

the City of Schertz by requiring all COP members to meet the same guidelines as set forth for full-time employees.

The cost of training volunteers is minimal. Most agencies require less than twenty hours of training before the volunteer was allowed to patrol. The Schertz Police Department requires their volunteers to take a driver safety course, CPR course, citizen patrol course, and a TCIC/ NCIC familiarization course. Over the past several years, privacy policies and laws have emerged in the medical field, banking, and virtually every industry that handles personal information. Law enforcement is no exception.

Dispatchers are required to take a Full Access TCIC/ NCIC course due to the data that they request via the computer and disseminate over the radio. Officers are required to take a Less-than-Full-Access TCIC/ NCIC course for receiving the information. For this same reason it is important that citizen volunteers need to receive training on this topic since they may be exposed to sensitive information while listening to the police radio or while at a scene with an officer.

CONCLUSION

Law enforcement agencies are often scrutinized by residents of their community for being unable to prevent crime in their neighborhoods. Residents are quick to blame their law enforcement agency, but do very little as far as personal involvement. The purpose of this research was to identify whether or not volunteers are an effective way to compliment the uniformed patrol force of smaller police departments. Will a citizen patrol be an acceptable alternative in order to relieve the workload from police patrols? It is hypothesized that effective citizen patrol programs are largely dependant on community interest in order to be effective and not on agency needs.

After reviewing the data, it revealed that a successful citizen patrol program is not linked to agencies of a specific size. Agencies with several thousand sworn officers were out numbered by their volunteer force just as small agencies with a hand full of officers, both having very successful programs. The keys to developing a volunteer program are to determine whether or not there is community interest, active agency involvement and support from the city or county government. By far, community interest, involvement and long-term commitment are essential for any COP program to succeed.

Agencies need to eliminate liability by performing thorough background checks to include a criminal history check and frequently monitor the driver's license status of all volunteers. Training must be provided to qualified volunteers for all functions that they will perform during their patrols. This should include courses in driver safety, CPR, Citizen Patrol Procedures, and TCIC/ NCIC Familiarization. A policy manual needs to be developed as a working guide for the volunteers as well as a means for the agency to hold the volunteers accountable for their actions. Agencies require a certain level of service from their paid employees and volunteers should be held to the same standard.

A method of recruiting needs to be created. This can include advertising the COP program in newsletters, local papers, neighborhood homeowners association meetings, and on a Web page. An application for the program should be included. Of course the most effective way to solicit community involvement is by holding periodic Citizen Police Academies. Once the program is operational it should be self sufficient in a sense. Interest will be created by COP members through word-of-mouth. Curiosity will also be generated when volunteers patrol communities in a marked COP vehicle.

Interested citizens can then be recruited to a program that serves their community and is operated by their community. A Citizen Patrol Program can be an effective way of supplementing a uniformed patrol force.

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APPENDIX 1

CITIZEN PATROL SURVEY

Agency: _____ Number of sworn officers: _____
 Name & Rank (optional) _____

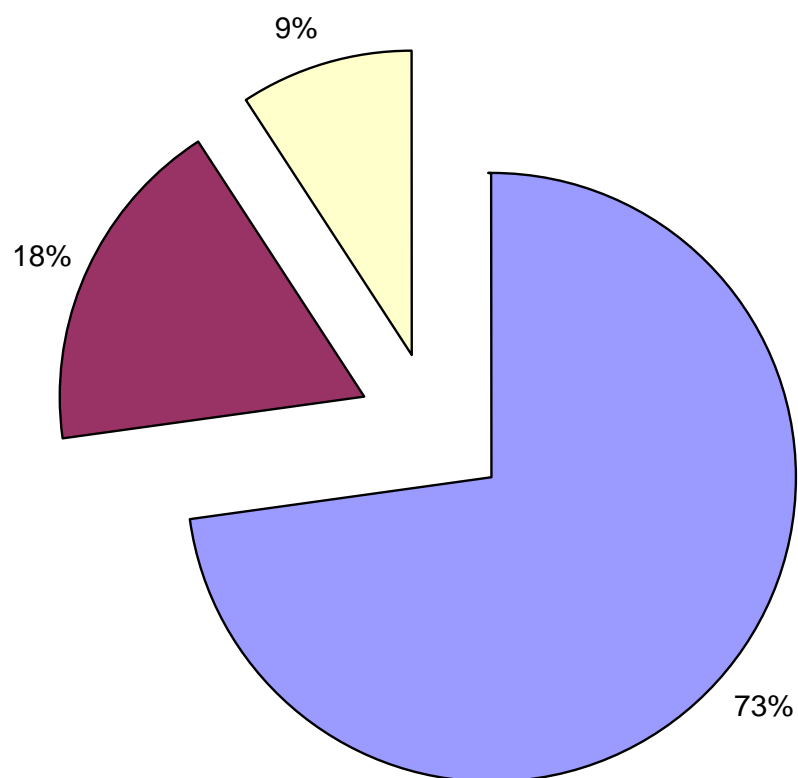
1. Does your agency have a citizen patrol program? _____
 (If yes, answer questions 2 - 7 If no, answer questions 8 - 10)
2. How long has your agency had the program? _____
3. How many citizens are active in the program? _____
4. Do you feel the program is effective? _____
5. Has there been a noticeable decrease in crime? _____
6. Does your agency have a policy for your citizen patrol program? _____
7. Who coordinates the program? Civilian Police officer
8. Has your agency ever considered a citizen patrol program? _____
9. Has your agency ever had a citizen patrol program that was disbanded? _____
 If so, why was it disbanded? _____
10. Do you believe that a citizen patrol program could benefit your community and be beneficial manpower support for your agency? _____

If your agency has a citizen patrol program please provide contact information of the program coordinator.

Name: _____
 Phone: _____
 e-mail: _____

Please return survey to: Lt. Michael Harris (Schertz Police Department)

Thank You

APPENDIX 2

■ AGENCIES WITHOUT COP PROGRAMS

■ AGENCIES WITH EFFECTICE COP PROGRAMS

■ AGENCIES WITH INEFFECTIVE COP PROGRAMS

APPENDIX 3