

**The Bill Blackwood  
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**Selective Deployment of Two Officer Patrol Units**



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**By  
David L. Long**

**Tyler Police Department  
Tyler, Texas  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Law enforcement department's debate over whether single officer patrol units or double officer patrol units are more productive or viable when implementing police response staffing strategies. This decision is an important factor to law enforcement because each agency wants to provide the best possible services to its population which it serves. Police supervision and administrators should make informed and decisive decisions when considering deployment tactics and response of its uniformed patrol division.

Many of the pre-established guidelines for sending one or two officers are based upon risk factors associated with the incident. So, if the determination is based on risk and severity of the call, police agencies should use selected deployment of double officer patrol units when the risk factors already exist. The factors which should be used when making these decisions are considering the severity and location of the call within a geographical area, officer safety decisions, and providing a more efficient call for service. Law enforcement agencies should use a detailed analysis of staffing requirements based on several deciding factors. It should develop policy and procedures when making decisions to use selected deployment of two officer patrol units.

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## INTRODUCTION

The use of double officer patrol units have been studied and discussed over the last several decades as to which deployment method is more viable for a law enforcement agency (Kaplan, 1979). Each law enforcement agency must decide when is appropriate to utilize deployment of a double patrol unit versus a single officer patrol unit. In the decision making process of whether which model to use, the law enforcement official must decide on factors as staffing availability, calls for service, and coverage area (Kaplan, 1979). Proponents have suggested that two officer patrol units can cover more area and answer more cars than single patrol units; however, opponents of double officer patrols have stated that one officer unit patrol are more efficient than two officer patrol units (Carmen & Guevara, 2003).

Directed patrol studies have indicated conflicting information over the past several decades. One of the first major studies to be published about police patrol and its effect was the Kansas City Patrol Experiment. This study indicated that there was no basic difference in reactive or directive patrol procedures (as cited in Carmen & Guevara, 2003). However, the Kansas City Patrol Experiment study did not examine specialized patrols and may have different findings (Carmen & Guevara, 2003).

Carmen and Guevara (2003) discussed the effectiveness of single officer patrols versus the two officer unit patrol. It considered many factors for their findings; for instance, traffic citations, report filings, arrest, and other measurable factors. Despite all these findings and recommendations, supervisors are no closer to having definitive evidence that patrol factors need to be considered prior to staffing and deployment.

The patrol division of a law enforcement agency is the uniform unit of its department. The primary purpose of any patrol division within law enforcement department is to respond to calls for service, be the primary first responders of incidents, and to have the first initial contact with the public. Law enforcement agencies usually have the majority of their uniform officers assigned to the patrol division (Carmen & Guevara, 2003). For example, a citizen calls the police agency to report a crime that is occurring or has already occurred; this is the first step in requesting police services. The law enforcement agency then dispatches an officer or officers to the location of the incident.

Next, each department bases the response of officers on a certain criteria the agency has established. This determination varies from department to department. The department will examine several factors for consideration. For instance, it will assess factors as what type of incident are the officers responding to, whether there is an active crime in progress, whether there are suspects still at the location, and whether the incident could cause immediate danger to the any other persons. Additionally, an examination of the risks associated to this type of incident may determine if the agency sends one or two officers. These guidelines or procedures have usually already been established through some type of public safety response guide.

Police supervision and administrators should make informed and decisive decisions when considering deployment tactics and response of its uniformed patrol division. Many of the pre-established guidelines for sending one or two officers are based upon risk factors associated with the incident. So, if the determination is based on risk and severity of the call, police agencies should use selected deployment of

double officer patrol units when the risk factors already exist. These risk factors may include areas known for large illegal drug trafficking, historical violent offender apprehension details, driving while intoxicated details, and calls for service time frames that have a higher percentage of double officer responses are important factors when deciding deployment methods.

## **POSITION**

Within any geographical area of a city, there are certain locations that are more prone to violence and disruption than other areas of the responding jurisdiction. Whether these factors are based on a socioeconomic disparity, opportunist availability, or a selective type of modus operandi, law enforcement officials use selective enforcement of deployment. The use of selective deployment of two-officer patrols will increase the efficiency of police services. For example, when the call for service involves violence or immediate danger, the agency should dispatch either two one-officer patrol units or one two-officer patrol unit ("One-Officer Versus", 2001). If the department sends two single officers patrol units to these types of calls, the first arriving officer usually waits for the arrival of the backup unit ("One-Officer Versus," 2001). This type of response will create an unnecessary delay in police service when the officers have to wait on the arrival of their backup.

Further, according to Cheist (1981), there is a disparity between the arrival times of a one officer patrol unit versus a two officer patrol. It was determined that when responding to a priority one type call, the single officer unit had "at least a 30% less" time than a double officer unit, and when the same single officer patrol unit responded to lower priority call, there was "at least a 40%" in difference than the two-man unit

response time (Cheist, 1981, p. 3.) One of the substantial issues of the single officer unit usage is the availability concern (Cheist, 1981).

It can be concluded that the geographical location of the officers responding will be a key indicator of on scene response times. An example of this is when two separate, single officer responding units are dispatched to a priority one type call. Both units are likely not situated in a neighboring location. Therefore, the single officer units will have to cover a greater distance and sometimes take a different route to the call. The two officer patrol unit will travel the same exact route, and it will arrive at the location at the same exact time.

The problem solving aspect plays a vital role when determining the outcome of a call for service as well. When there are two officers patrolling together in a single patrol car, he or she can use each other as a resource in solving the outcome of the call. For instance, exchanging ideas with one another, the officers can reach a more optimal solution faster ("Policing," 2013). Additionally, it is theorized the two officer patrol unit will be more efficient in the processing of their administration duties as well ("Policing," 2013). Officers can share responsibilities in writing, driving, and observation as they patrol or respond to their designated locations. Thus, by providing support for each other, the two officer patrol units can be more efficient in arrival times giving a specific set of circumstances.

Officer injuries and safety are always a topic of discussion within any law enforcement agency. Law enforcement and city leaders, managers, and employees constantly evaluate job injuries, hoping to find the cause and effect, so they can reduce it. There are several factors that can have effect on officer injuries while on duty.

Consider the knowledge that each officer must request and transmit via some type of device to stay in direct contact with her or his police department. In most agencies, the officer must rely upon the use of a radio. Whether it is a handheld device or a stationary radio in car device, the officer must physically use it.

As with any new technology, problems can arise to hinder its use, resulting in the officer possibly being injured if the department's 800 MHz radio or any other communication tool fails to work properly. The failure of the primary communication between officers and dispatch can have devastating results. The Bloomington, Illinois police department experienced a statewide radio system crash during a normal system upgrade that lasted over 90 minutes (Simpson, 2001). This has been an ongoing issues with not only Bloomington, but other surrounding law enforcement agencies that use the same radio system (Simpson, 2001).

Officers have experienced the inability to communicate with not just their department, but their fellow officers in the field, too. Despite having new software patches installed, the radio system transmissions continually create communication problems for the officers. As a result of these issues, the Bloomington Police Department have mandated two officer patrol units on their historically high volume shifts which are the early evenings and late night patrols (Simpson, 2001).

Whether it is evaluating the efficiency of the two officer patrol units, or it is from a safety perspective, there is sufficient information indicating that deploying patrol units with double officers is advantageous depending upon a particular set of circumstances. Most departments already send two officers to every call the majority of the time (Carmen & Guevara, 2003). Additionally, departments already use two officer



deployments when operating a specialized detail based on certain high risk factors and specific criteria (Warren, 1985).

## **COUNTER POSITION**

The debate about the two officer patrol unit is not without arguments against its use. Opponents of double officer patrol units have raised valid concerns in their opposition. There are several debatable arguments for the use of single officer units over deploying the two officer unit. The most prominent argument for the single officer unit is that it is considered more cost effective than their two officer counterparts. It has been stated that two separate individual in a solo officer patrol units can cover more area than a two officer patrol car; therefore, the single officer approach provides a wider range of police services (Johnson, 1999).

However, what this argument does not take into consideration is the tactical response to an active violent offense. For example, the active shooter response requires that multiple officers arrive at the same approximant time to be effective. Unfortunately, this particular type of response is becoming more prevalent among law enforcement agencies. The most crucial situational considerations to this type of event is a rapid multiple response (Buerger & Buerger, 2010).

Many tactical officers are trained and practice that “the best patrol response to an active shooter in a school or workplace involves four officers” (“Two-officer,” 2001, p. 81). This type of deployment will increase the odds of a favorable outcome for success. Now, by examining the best practices, it will require at least four separate single officer units to accomplish. Based on the previous opponent argument against the use of two officer patrol units, which claims it is more cost effective for the single units because the

individuals units can cover twice as much area, the probability that these officers will be in close proximity will be drastically diminished. However, the same argument can be made for the two separate, two officer patrol units as well.

As with any tactical solution, the best practices are not a hard and fast rule. For instance, if a law enforcement office is utilizing a two officer patrol, the first unit to arrive will be able to react with the absolute minimum recommended response (Anonymous, 2001). The two officer patrol unit can enter the premises and achieve entry into the location and react to the hostile situation. Evaluating the needs of response to cost effectiveness is a very difficult task for any law enforcement agency. Therefore, these decisions have to be made not only considering just the cost benefits but also considering the execution of the best possible scenario to which an agency may potential respond to.

Additionally, another opponent to the two officer patrol unit states that in addition to the possibilities of over confidence, the two officer patrol units may have an adverse reaction from the general public or area they serve, which will cause an increase in citizens' complaints against police personnel (Johnson, 1999). The public may view the double officer presence in a manner completely differently than being confronted by the single officer. The citizen may react adversely because he or she may feel that the requirement is not necessary which could be misunderstood by the officers, resulting in a more aggressive approach (Johnson, 1999). This argument theorizes that there will be increase in departmental complaints as a result.

Now, what this argument does not take in consideration is the possibility of the two officers patrol unit dynamic. For instance, a single officer may hesitate to react to a

dangerous situation if he or she presumes a risk which she or he is not prepared for ("One-officer," 2001). The single officer may not have their backup officer readily available, so he may neglect his duties in controlling an adversarial citizen ("One-officer," 2001). The two officer unit approach provides immediate back up and operational readiness to handle those situations requiring a critical response.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Determining the most effective patrol procedures response is a challenging undertaking for a law enforcement agency. The department must consider the historical role of the patrol division and its application to police services. The issue of which method is the most viable for an individual department has much contemplation. The primary consideration for a police supervisor or its command personnel is to balance the needs of the department with the needs of its citizen and their needs.

Factors to consider in police deployment will have to be decided on several contributing issues. Studies conducted by the Winnipeg and Bloomington police agencies have theorized the particular applications required for what deployment should be used ("One-officer," 2001; Simpson, 2001). Double officer units have shown to be advantageous in certain aspects. The two officer unit approach can increase the efficiency of police services. Factors to consider are that double officer units have shown to react sooner to hostile or high situations where single officer would most likely have to wait on a backup officer to arrive. According to Cheist's (1981) study, the two officer patrol has shown to have a potential decrease in response times when responding to calls for service. Additionally, the double officer unit has a better tactical advantage when responding to in progress active violent incidents. Further, when

technology fails to operate properly, the double officer units has an immediate officer resource available. For instance, when the law enforcement agency's radio service fails to work, the officer will have decreased stress due to not having immediate backup.

The two officer approach has been criticized by its opponents in area of customer service and not being cost effective. The single officer patrol can patrol a greater range of area separately which is a cost consideration the department. This method allows a more disperse patrol which will provide more visibility within a certain patrol section of a department's geographical area of responsibility. Further, the counter position states that the community perception of the two officer patrol unit can influence their behavior. It also states that officers may be over-confident when working alongside another officer, and the officers could take a more aggressive approach to handling citizen encounters, which may result in a higher number outside citizen complaints.

Agency personnel will need to evaluate their calls for service in each geographical area to determine the best practices for two officer patrol deployment methods. A careful analysis will be required to consider all concerns perceived by using this type of deployment strategy. By examining and weighing both the advantageous and disadvantageous, police command personnel will be justify their intentions reasons to those concerned by two officer deployments. A constant evaluation of the system will need to be established in order for individuals to understand the reasoning for the tactical decisions involved in the process.

Police supervisors and command staff will be able to make more informed decisions when implementing patrol deployments when he or she considers the all the contributing factors involved. In addition, the agency needs to implement training, good

practice procedures, and create a culture of understanding for two officer patrol units.

When the law enforcement agency uses a good methodical approach and analysis, the law enforcement agency will be able to properly optimize the use of a selective deployment system when using a two patrol unit patrol when the risks warrant its use.

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