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**DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A "CITIZEN ON PATROL" PROGRAM**

A Policy Research Project  
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## **Abstract**

Budgetary dollars for police administrators in recent years have not been plentiful. Additionally, as they find themselves competing more and more with other internal department heads, those dollars will remain difficult to obtain. As a result, these administrators have had to use all available resources, in their quest to accomplish goals. One resource that is sometimes overlooked is the citizen population at large, and one way to use this resource is to establish a "Citizen on Patrol" (COP) program. When properly structured, the results of such a program are clear. Together the police and the citizens can "put a dent" in neighborhood crime.

The purpose of this paper is to identify issues of policy development that should help implement a COP program. In addition, it should show that such a program can be accomplished without a large monetary outlay. To accomplish this, policy/procedures of several different departments were reviewed and estimated costs were compared.

The conclusion will indicate the programs reviewed all had several similar policy/procedures in place. The differences came in providing equipment to each patroller, with communication equipment being the major difference. However, this paper will show a program of this nature can be implemented in any department, where the desire exists to undertake the project.

## **Introduction**

An objective of any police administrator is to utilize all available resources at their disposal. One such resource is that of the citizen population at – large. For many years this important resource has been overlooked. One way to use this unique resource is the formation of a “Citizen on Patrol” (COP) program. In recent years police administrators have sought ways to bridge the ever-increasing gap between the citizen and their police, and to do so in a time when budgetary funds are not as plentiful. They have longed for the days when the relationship between the “Beat Cop” and the citizen was once again in harmony. In a time when almost every action taken by the police is debated, it is important that police departments begin to enlist the help of their citizens. When properly structured, the results of such a program can be readily visible and can be accomplished without an enormous amount of dollars. However, only proper planning can provide an atmosphere for success. This planning should include having policies and procedures in place prior to implementation of the program.

The purpose of this paper is to identify issues of policy development and implementation of a COP program. In addition, another intent is to show this can be accomplished without a large monetary outlay. Hopefully, this paper will serve as a useful guide in the development of policies related to COP programs.

The work on this project will primarily benefit the Richardson Police Department. However, the results should be beneficial to any police department that desires to establish a COP program. The author hopes to provide a guideline, or thought process for others to consider in preparing their programs.

There will be three sources of information used for this project. First, the existing policies and procedures of the Richardson Police Department will be used as the primary reference point and guideline for information contained within. Second, information from other law enforcement agencies currently involved with COP programs will be reviewed. The second source will provide this author with other examples of current policies, as it applies to this citizen-oriented program. In addition, it should provide information concerning successes and/or failures of other programs. Third, other current literature and published information on this topic will be reviewed. It is hoped the review of these sources, and their applications, will provide an effective guide to policy making, in establishing a COP program.

### **Historical, Legal, or Theoretical Context**

In August of 1992 the Richardson Heights Homeowners Association approached the Richardson Police Department concerning the establishment of a Citizen on Patrol (COP) program. Representatives of the association had spoken on several occasions with members of a COP group operating under the Fort Worth Police Department's Code Blue program. They felt their neighborhood had experienced a large number of burglaries and thefts and believed a COP program would be beneficial. As a result, my department began developing policies and procedures to implement such a program.

From the outset, Police Chief Kenneth Yarbrough wanted to place operational control of the program with the department's Crime Prevention Unit. Since the overall goal of

program was to prevent crime, it was a natural place of assignment. As a result, the program became an extension of our Neighborhood Crime Watch Program and given the name of Crime Watch Patrol (CWP). There were two other mandates from the Chief that as the supervisor of the Crime Prevention Unit I would have to comply with. The first one was a philosophical issue. The entire area of the Richardson Heights Homeowners Association would be required to have 100% participation in Neighborhood Crime Watch. The idea being the more involved the citizens became the better chance of success for the CWP. At that particular time the Richardson Heights neighborhood had an approximate participation of 60%. A March 1, 1993, implementation date was established and we were given six months, September 1<sup>st</sup>, to reach our 100% participation goal. The second mandate was a budgetary issue. The program was not considered for implementation until after the 1992-93 budget was finalized. This meant there were no budgeted funds and costs would have to be held to a minimum.

The Richardson Heights area was not unlike other areas where a citizen patrol program was wanted. The majority of the neighborhood patrols emerged in relation to a chronic or severe crime problem in the neighborhood (e.g., burglaries, purse snatchings, and undesirable juvenile activities) (Rand, p.62). The Richardson Heights neighborhood is made up of approximately 830 homes and the year previous to Crime Watch Patrol (March '92 through February '93) there were 22 reported burglaries, 25 thefts and 11 criminal mischiefs. The homeowners felt they would be able to help make a difference. The reasons for volunteering will vary, i.e.; there are not enough police officers in any city to be aware of what is going on. So our eyes and ears help, and it is a partnership

with the police and citizens getting involved to prevent crime (Telemasp, p.6). Our job was to get the group pulled together as a working entity. The first mandate, 100% participation in Neighborhood Crime Watch proved to be the hardest to accomplish. Without the assistance of Mrs. Darlene Sudbrink, one of the hardest working Crime Watch coordinators I've ever met, our crime prevention officers might not have reached the goal. As it was, we were actually midway into September before the last section of streets and homes were given a Crime Watch designation, but that was due more to other program schedule conflicts than to a neighborhood problem. It is this author's belief the goal to require 100% participation in Neighborhood Crime Watch is one any COP program should pursue. When neighbors get to know one another and interact on a more frequent basis they will recognize an activity or person that is out of place in their neighborhood and be in a better position to protect it. As Fred Wilson police coordinator for San Diego, California patrols puts it, "A crook has to live off the land to survive. If he isn't allowed to exist, if everytime he turns around someone calls the police, he won't exist" (Wall Street Journal). Now, add to that a cross section of neighborhood citizens out patrolling their neighborhood streets and you strengthen the fight against crime.

The second mandate of holding the implementation cost to a minimum was not as difficult as anticipated. There were two things we knew that had to be accomplished. One was visibility/identification of patrollers and the other was the ability to communicate, while on patrol. From visibility/identification standpoint we felt the minimum requirements would be magnetic signs for vehicles the citizens were using and T-shirts and windbreakers for each participant to wear, while patrolling. Each of these

items would have the City of Richardson Crime Watch Patrol logo printed on them. When we considered the choices of how CWP members were going to communicate we found we could accomplish our budgetary goal of costs being held to a minimum. We were aware that the Code Blue program provided 800megahertz portable radios to their COP groups, however it would require the purchase of at least two portables. One would be used by the patrolling member(s) and the other by a member at a stationary location, or base station. The base station would normally be the residence of one of the COP members. Another option was to consider the use of mobile phones. At the time it would have required purchasing the phones, as well as airtime, which placed an unknown cost factor, since we would not know how often the phones would be used. Because of the expense of 800mgh radios and the unknown monthly cost of airtime, we chose to pursue the use of a citizen band radio system.

### **Review of Literature or Practice**

In reviewing the practices of other COP programs I found that many of the rules for conduct, or guidelines, overlap. For instance the following are common in the City of Richardson's Crime Watch Patrol, Ft. Worth's Code Blue COP, and Travis County's Volunteers In Patrol: (City of Richardson CWP Policy, pp.3-4) (Code Blue COP, p.2) Travis County Volunteers In Patrol Program Manual, pp. 7-8)

- Members will not confront, detain, or attempt to arrest suspects or suspicious persons.
- Members will not carry any weapons or firearms, while patrolling.



- Members will not consume alcoholic beverages or take drugs/medications that affect mental alertness for a minimum of four hours immediately before or during the patrol shift.
- Members will obey all the laws of the United States and State of Texas, including traffic laws.
- Members will wear identifying apparel or have some type of identifying document on their person, while on patrol.

In addition to these common member requirements most programs also require patrol visibility by requiring mobile patrols be identified. This is accomplished by the placement of magnetic signs on the patroller's vehicles (City of Richardson CWP Policy, p. 4) (Telemasp, p. 8) (City of Dallas VIP Program, p. 2).

In addition to these "do's and don'ts" many of the administrative issues are the same. Information gathered or observed by patrol members must be captured and submitted for evaluation. Whether the position is called Program Coordinator or Patrol Coordinator each of the COP's designate someone to do the following (City of Richardson CWP Policy, pp. 1-2) (Travis County Volunteers In Patrol Program Manual, p. 4) (Telemasp, p. 4):

- Be the contact person, or liaison to the Police Department. Responsible for the day to day operation of the patrol group.
- Setting patrol schedules
- Submitting activity reports, and or, information gathered by patrollers to the Police Department.

In reviewing other COP's there are three things our program requires that I have not seen in others. The first would be the requirement of 100% participation in the Neighborhood Crime Watch program. This is a requirement that I believe helps to strengthen the overall concept. As I mentioned earlier, neighbors who know one another, and who interact with each other frequently, will tend to recognize the unusual or out of place activity more quickly. I also believe another part of knowing each other will create a willingness to help each other when schedule conflicts arise. This will help to keep the program alive and well.

The second difference is a requirement for a set number of hours to be patrolled each week. In our program, in order to maintain the status of a CWP Area, members as a group must log at least nine (9) hours of patrol time each week. A week is defined as beginning at 0001 hours Sunday and ending at 2400 hours Saturday (City of Richardson CWP Policy, p. 1). This requirement is another way to forge a partnership with the Police Department and the COP group. Your department will depend on information from the COP and likewise the COP will depend on information from the department. Hopefully the requirement will also keep interest and motivation alive. As long as information is flowing back and forth this should occur, but if there is no requirement to patrol that flow will likely be hampered.

The third difference is an additional identification tool. In an effort to help not only our CWP members, but also our patrol officers, we supply each home in the CWP area a static sticker for each vehicle at the residence. This sticker identifies the particular CWP

area and is placed on the vehicle where it can be readily seen by CWP patrollers and our officers (see example below). It is preferred the sticker be placed in the lower left corner of the rear window. This enables those patrolling the area to spot vehicles that may not belong to a local resident. From a patrol officer standpoint this can be helpful during routine patrol activities or if responding to a suspicious person/vehicle type call.

Example of static sticker      ⇨



In addition, the cost factor for this is not a major one. We purchased these from the sticker plant operated by the Texas Department of Corrections, at a cost of thirteen (13) cents apiece for the first 2000.

### **Discussion of Relevant Issues**

As stated earlier, 60% of the Richardson Heights area was already involved in the Neighborhood Crime Watch Program. This gave us a base to build upon. You must identify those crime watch members that are committed to the program and use them to encourage others to participate. In addition, you must have support from your department management and city leaders. "The only way a program like this will be successful is to have caring volunteers and the support of your Chief, City Manager, and City Council" (Gescheidle). After this is accomplished you can move forward with your plan of action. One thing to consider is having a city leader attend one of your

neighborhood organizational meetings. If possible the area city council representative would be a good choice. This will help to show people the city and the department is committed. If everyone gets on the same page, you will have all the volunteers you need to begin. You can then focus on operational and equipment issues, with equipment being the budgetary issue that will likely determine the decisions of those who control the coffers.

Two key issues in initiating our program were one, get the entire neighborhood involved, via the Neighborhood Crime Watch Program and, two implement the program without expending a large amount of dollars. However, we also had to provide some form of identification for patrolling members and adequate communications. It was now time to tackle the funding issue.

From an identification standpoint, you are going to need some type of wearing apparel that your COP member will wear during their patrol time. It should have some type of symbol of recognition, i.e. your City and COP logos. This will allow your officers quick recognition, when they respond to a location where a COP member has summoned them. For our purposes we provided a T-shirt for summertime and a windbreaker for wintertime. The T-shirts and windbreakers, with front and back logos screen-printed on each one, cost \$9.00 and \$16.75 each respectively (RPD Memo, Costs). This comes to a total of \$25.75 for each patroller. In comparison, although a ball cap is included, Ft. Worth's Code Blue initially spent \$27.16 for each patroller's apparel (Ellis). Also included in the identification package is a set of magnetic signs, to be placed on the

patrolling vehicle. Two large, one for each side of the car, and a small one for the trunk area. For multiple sets this will cost from \$80 to \$94.00 (Ellis, RPD Memo). From a budgetary standpoint, the cost factor for the identification of your patrollers will probably be somewhat similar. However, the decision concerning the method of two-way communication will have a significant impact on your initial start-up costs.

The Richardson Police looked at portable police radios, mobile phones, and citizen band radios. At the time we were not aware of any outside funding programs that would make mobile phones available. As of today, you should find programs/grants available from organizations like the Community Police Consortium that will provide mobile phones for crime prevention programs. In addition, you will likely find local wireless communications companies willing to help. Not knowing the availability of any special funding, we ruled out mobile phones due to monthly charges and unknown airtime cost. We also ruled out portable police radios. This was basically due to a cost factor. We learned from the Crestwood Homeowners Association, in Ft. Worth's Code Blue program, that they were supplied two 800 megahertz portable police radios. The cost of these radios was approximately \$1600.00 each (Ellis). One would be used as a base station, at a stationary location, and the other to be used in the patrolling vehicle. The unique feature of these radios is that patrol officers have the ability to switch over to the COP's frequency and talk directly to the person (Police Chief, p54). We knew we wanted to use the base station and mobile radio concept, and that meant two radios. However, two portable police radios alone would mean approximately \$3200.00 and we felt we needed to find another alternative. Ultimately we chose to begin our program

with citizen band radios. We felt the geographic boundaries of the area would not create a reception problem and prevent patrollers from effectively communicating with the base station. We began with two base units, two hand held walkie-talkies, a power supply, and two magnetic antennas. This came to a cost of approximately \$273.00 (RPD Memo, Costs). When the costs of apparel, communication equipment, and the static stickers for vehicle identification were all totaled, our budgetary expense for implementation was approximately \$1600.00. It has now been six years since the implementation of our first CWP. As time has passed we have learned that using citizen band radios should only be used as a short-term item. The wear and tear of moving those radios around from member to member creates down time with repairs and that means less patrol time for your members ( Solaja).

### **Conclusions/Recommendations**

The purpose of this paper was to address issues of policy development and implementation of a Citizen on Patrol program and to also show it can be done without a large budgetary outlay.

In previous years, and future years to come, police departments will have to compete internally with other city departments for operating funds. Hopefully the information here can help get your citizens involved, without a large expenditure and still show results. If that happens, your ability to get those operating funds improves. Of course the question is, Will it show results? Does a COP program work? I think it does. During the

first full year of operation for the Richardson Heights CWP, residential burglary decreased 86%, criminal mischief decreased 81%, and thefts decreased 64% (RPD Memo, Stats). Two additional CWP's have now been activated: Richland Park and Springridge. Richland Park had an overall crime reduction of 38% in the first six months (Gescheidle) and Springridge a 40% overall reduction (Wilkerson). Once lowered, the crime reports have remained stable in these areas with only occasional jumps. Similar results were found in the Code Blue COP program. During the first year, overall crime in COP areas dipped 30-50% and has remained fairly stable, with the occasional spikes (Murtaugh). Has CWP been the only reason for this success? Probably not, but I will submit to you the combination of a CWP, a neighborhood with 100% participation in Neighborhood Crime Watch, and the support of the Police Department had a profound effect.

As recommendations for members, the following are absolutes:

- Members will not confront, detain, or attempt to arrest (stay in the car).
- Members will not carry any weapons or firearms, while patrolling.
- Members will not consume alcoholic beverages or take drugs/medications that affect mental alertness for a minimum of four hours immediately before/during patrol shift.
- Members will obey all the laws of the USA and State of Texas, including traffic laws.
- Members will wear identifying apparel, while on patrol.

As for operational issues, the following is recommended:

- Whether you call it a Program or Patrol Coordinator, appoint a volunteer to handle the administrative issues (contact person for department, preparing schedules, submitting reports, etc.).
- Require your COP to patrol a minimum number of hours per week. This should insure weekly contact with the police department.
- Consider the static sticker for identification of neighborhood vehicles.
- Meet with the group on a regular basis, i.e. monthly, bi-monthly, or quarterly. The relationship must be maintained as personally as possible.

Finally, these two suggestions: First, if controlling cost is an initial concern, then the citizen band radio is a good communication alternative, but only for the short term. I would plan for success and look to the budgetary process for providing two portable police radios for each group you begin and; secondly, I would strongly urge you to marry any COP program to your Neighborhood Crime Watch program. It is a natural union. Having concerned residents patrolling the streets of their own neighborhood's sends a clear message to everyone in the neighborhood that crime will not be tolerated (Travis County's Volunteers In Patrol, p. 3). Combine the efforts of the patrollers with the rest of the neighborhood residents and you have more eyes and ears. The beauty of Citizens on Patrol is that it can be implemented in a variety of forms and within an agency of any size. The only absolute requirement is that an agency develop a strong base of communication with the community it serves and tailor the program to the needs outlined by the citizens (Police Chief, p 54). No criminal wants to be observed and having residents driving around and be the watchful eye will make the criminal go elsewhere.



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