

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

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**Field Training Officer Programs: A Powerful  
Tool in Policing Today**

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**An Administrative Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Toward the latter part of the twentieth century, law enforcement agencies recognized the need for formal and documented field training programs. The purpose for such programs have proven to provide more effective policing in our profession. As field training programs became a standard practice among agencies, it was found due to various reasons, many agencies do not provide such extended training beyond what is mandated by the state. Case study proves that civil suits against the police have increased. Failure to train or lack of training have been issues in this area more often than not. The researcher found that more remote areas of the state of Texas are behind the times in every day practice of the average department in providing documented field training programs for newly hired officers. This is primarily due to budgeting, depletion of manpower, and resistance to change. This was discovered through surveys and interviews of agencies throughout the state. Perhaps state funded programs would eliminate the problem of lack of funding in providing documented field training programs.

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## INTRODUCTION

Toward the latter part of the twentieth century, police agencies of all sizes across the country recognized the need for effective Field Training Programs for new officers. In 1972, the San Jose, California Police Department developed and implemented a valid field training program for their agency. This model, known as the "San Jose Model", has been copied and modified by departments of all sizes nationwide, to suit individual department needs (Haider, 1990). Since then other styles of field training programs have been developed to suit the needs of communities and departments.

Police everywhere are affected by the rising number of civil lawsuits. Effective field training programs have proven to be a contributor to the increasing numbers of police victories in civil suits. There are many reasons to establish and maintain a valid and effective field training program. Some of those include improved personnel selection, reduced civil liability, work quality and morale, legal defensibility, and affirmative action factors (Unsinger, 1990). In a police agency, the officers are the richest resource of the agency. Through a valid and effective field training program the time and investment put into training a new officer helps protect the officer and the agency in civil litigation. The number of civil lawsuits filed against police was nearly 35,000 in 1997 (Calibre Press). Police victories in civil suits have risen from 42% in 1989 to nearly 65% in 1999 (Calibre Press, 1999).

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The purpose of this project is to research the effects of field training programs in police agencies of all sizes from across the state of Texas. More specifically answer the question: Do the more populated areas of the State take advantage of utilizing Field Training Programs as opposed to areas in more remote, less populated areas of the State? The method of inquiry utilized will be surveys, review of literature, case law review, and trends and practices in the training aspects.

The intended outcome of this research is to present the need for field training programs not only in largely populated communities but also across all boundaries, including local, state, and federal jurisdictions. In today's police world, will this become a vital tool in maintaining a successful, productive, and effective police agency? As a result of this project, insight will be gained to provide information that can produce overall positive results for both the public and the police. Many smaller agencies across Texas hire only certified personnel due to enormous costs incurred to provide academy training. This practice places law enforcement agencies without a valid documented field training program in a critical position should such an agency become involved in a civil lawsuit involving training issues. Agency administrators need to be aware of the potential liability being created by not providing a structured and documented field training program. Should an officer cause harm to an individual due to lack of training, the agency may be held accountable. Liability can be

assessed if agencies do not train their officers in an appropriate manner to prepare them for their duties and responsibilities (Bevering 1999).

In 1989, The Commission of Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc., mandated guidelines for all nationally accredited agencies. An accredited agency is required to have a field training program with a minimum of four weeks. The program criteria must include job task analysis of frequent types of incidents, an evaluation technique to measure competence, guidelines for the evaluation of recruit officers, a selection process for field training officers, training of the field training officers, rotation of field assignments, as well as several other areas (Bevering, 1999).

In the wake of the Supreme Court's landmark decision regarding training standards (*City of Canton v. Harris*, 109 S. Ct. 1197 [1989]), almost every piece of police litigation filed today asserts inadequate training (Calibre Press, 1999). Even experienced officers should be trained on the operational procedures of a new department with documentation indicating such training was provided. Often, in remote areas of Texas, it is taken for granted that major incidents rarely occur in these areas and their law enforcement officers are required to perform on a minimal level, as prescribed by State standards. One major or seemingly minor incident involving law enforcement that results in a civil suit against a police agency could result in financial tragedy for the agency and the community. In the United States, contact is made with the police, either directly or indirectly at some point in the lifetime of a person. The actions of an officer in such contact can be scrutinized and liability issues exist.

The categories of the use of lethal and non-lethal force represent critical issues for police agencies and exhibit high-risk areas for liability. A lack of continuing training after the academy was found to have risen to a level of deliberate indifference involving deadly force, searches and seizures, and pursuits. In *Bordanaro v. McLeod* (1989), the plaintiff was awarded \$5.3 million for deliberate indifference due to a practice of “breaking down doors” without a warrant. (Ross, 2003). In the case of *Davis v. Mason County* (1991) a jury awarded four plaintiffs over one (1) million dollars each, in compensatory and punitive damages along with attorney fees. The court determined the county exhibited deliberate indifference to the training needs of deputies in the constitutional limits of the use of force. Deputies were alleged to have stopped, beaten, and illegally arrested citizens for approximately four months. It was discovered deputies had little or no training, with one deputy not having attended a basic academy (Ross, 2003).

## **METHODOLOGY**

Two surveys were conducted of various agencies by the researcher of this project. The first survey, Appendix I, was conducted in October 2003, of the participants of Module II of LEMIT at Texas Woman’s University, Denton, Texas. Most of the respondents of the survey were from agencies of various sizes within the State, that were either near or within a major city such as Dallas/Ft. Worth, Houston, Austin, and San Antonio. All but one of the respondents reported their agencies did have a field training program in place. The agency without a documented field training program is a small West Texas municipal agency. The

second survey, conducted by telephone, consisted of agencies of various sizes, in the West Texas area. One on one interviews with officers from agencies around the state was also conducted.

## **FINDINGS**

The basis of the questionnaires was to determine agencies in Texas that currently have valid field training programs (see appendix I). The first questionnaire was submitted to the 25 participants of the 55<sup>th</sup> session of module II of LEMIT, using Interstate 35 as a divider of the state, east and west. The participants represented 17 agencies from the state. 15 of the 17 agencies inquired of were in or near largely populated areas of Texas. The second questionnaire specifically targets more remote areas of West Texas (see appendix II). The second survey was conducted by telephone. The findings of the survey revealed small agencies in more remote areas of the State, specifically West Texas, do not provide field training programs for new hired officers.

During the telephone survey many of the small West Texas agencies did not respond. Of the responding agencies, it was found that many agencies within remote areas do not provide documented training for newly hired officers. It was also found that larger municipal agencies, those that employ more than 150 commissioned personnel, do provide field training programs. Many depend on common sense and state standards. As peace officers, we rely on many standards. No longer does a man's word stand alone. We have the power to take a human life if needed and are expected to protect life and property when



the need exists. In today's world the documented training of an officer is the foundation of an agencies ability to defend an officers actions and support the policies developed by the agency. Based on information from the personnel and recruiting division of a mid-size West Texas municipal agency, the cost to hire, equip, and put a new recruit through a basic academy is approximately \$17,000. This expense put into a valuable department resource warrants the provision of extended training such as effective field training.

## **DISCUSSION / CONCLUSIONS**

Is there a need for a mandated field training program for all agencies to protect officers, agencies, and the public? Agencies that provide field training beyond that of basic academy training, are protected from rising costs of civil litigation in cases involving police for failure to train while developing above standard employees. For many small agencies funding is a major factor for not providing such training. Perhaps if field training were mandated, state funding would be provided for agencies where lack of funding exist.

The purpose of this research is not to condemn small agencies in areas of remote West Texas. The same oath is sworn to be upheld by all that take it. Cultural differences exist within our state that have an effect on how application of our job duties are performed. As stated above, It was found that many small agencies in largely populated areas of Texas provide field training programs for new officers, regardless of the amount of experience of an officer. Availability of resources in largely populated areas helps make this possible. The West Texas area covers a vast amount land, some counties being larger in square miles than

some states in the eastern United States, however are less populated. Six of these counties border Mexico. It seems these agencies need protection from civil litigation as much as agencies from any other area in the state. Day to day tasks can differ for officers in a small West Texas agency and officers from a small North Central Texas agency. A small three man department in West Texas understands that back-up can be hours away versus minutes away. Many times the only available assistance is from citizens within an area. Preparing an officer to be aware of their community needs and department requirements can be covered in a basic field training program. An agency can develop their own specific needs based on community standards. State funded field training programs can be proven beneficial for agencies in remote areas cutting travel expense, avoid depletion of manpower, and protect an agency and its resources.

Throughout time, field training programs have proven to be a very effective tool in policing. Some major factors in utilizing a documented field training program are the defensibility in civil lawsuits, work quality, and personnel selection. Such programs can be easily adapted to meet the needs of individual departments regardless of size and location. A state funded field training program would relieve the burden of budgeting issues for agencies without a field training program with limited budgets.

Surveys have revealed that many small agencies in remote areas of West Texas do not provide field training programs for new officers while small agencies in heavily populated areas do provide field training programs. It has also been found that more small municipal agencies in remote areas of West

Texas are developing field training programs than are county agencies. Many times the resistance to change prevents the creation of new policy or practice. Maintaining updated information on methods of operation for the law enforcement profession is a full time job. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, law enforcement professionals recognized the need for field training programs and began implementing such programs. Within this short amount of time, field training programs have proven to be worth the time and effort they require. Perhaps the practice of providing field training programs will become as common a practice as basic certification training.

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## Appendix I

Fellow LEMI Participants of 55<sup>th</sup> Session of Module II  
T.W.U., Denton, Tx., Oct 5-24, 2003

Just like you, I'm working on my research paper. I've attached a survey and am requesting your assistance by asking you to complete the survey and return it to me by Wed 10/15/03. I'll be glad to do the same in return should you submit a survey.

Thanks for your help!

B.J. Land

1. Give the geographic location of your agency, using IH 35 as the divider?

Circle one                      East Texas                      West Texas

2. What size is your agency (commissioned personnel)? Check one 1-50\_\_\_\_\_,

51-100\_\_\_\_\_, 101-150\_\_\_\_\_, 151 and above\_\_\_\_\_

3. Is your agency (circle one) ?

Municipal      County      State      Federal

School District      Other\_\_\_\_\_

4. Does your agency have a documented Field Training Program with written policy and procedure and a standard operating procedure?

Yes                      No

\*If yes, answer questions 5 and 6

5. What is the length of your program?# \_\_\_\_\_wks.\_\_\_\_\_mos.

6. Does your Field Training Program require all newly hired officers complete the program?

Yes                      No

If the answer is no, please explain why;

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7. Has your agency been sued regarding training issues for new officers?

Yes

No