

**The Bill Blackwood
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**Sex Offenders and Sexual Predators in
Small Municipalities and Rural Communities**

**An Administrative Research Paper
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ABSTRACT

Sex offenders and sexual predators in small municipalities and rural communities is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because of the importance of the safety to the community in reference to sex offenders and sexual predators who reside in the neighborhood of these communities. Sex offenders and sexual predators have a high percentage rate of re-offending so it is very important that law enforcement agencies exhaust all resources, as well as ideas, to reinforce the safety of the community as a whole.

The purpose of this research is to examine if law enforcement in small municipalities and rural communities were doing everything necessary to ensure the safety of their citizens in regards to sex offenders and sexual predators. Also to examine if and what more should be done, other than guidelines listed in state law, to reinforce the safety of the community in regards to this issue.

The method of inquiry used by the researcher included a review of books, newspaper articles, magazine articles, and a survey distributed to ten survey recipients.

The researcher discovered that small and rural law enforcement agencies are doing enough to manage, monitor, and track their sex offenders and sexual predators, but more could and should be done to reinforce the safety of the community in reference to this issue.

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INTRODUCTION

In society today there are numerous news reports, news articles, discussions, and debates, in reference to sex offenders and sexual predators. Almost every day something in the news about sex offenders and sexual predators can be found. Even some of the laws have been changed regarding these issues because of actual events that have happened in regards to sex offenders and sexual predators. Some of the laws, as well as an alert system, have been introduced and named after the victims that were victimized at the hands of a sex offender and / or a sexual predator.

Unfortunately, small municipalities and rural communities do not have the resources available to them that larger agencies have at their disposal. Larger agencies are able to commit more time, resources, and manpower to the issue of sex offenders and sexual predators within their cities and / or communities. For example, larger agencies are able to establish a single unit and / or division just for the purpose of monitoring and tracking sex offenders and sexual predators that reside within their municipality and / or communities. Therefore, smaller municipalities and rural communities have to be able to manage their time, resources, as well as their manpower, in a way that will provide the safest possible living environment within their municipalities and / or communities concerning sex offenders and sexual predators.

Sex offenders and sexual predators are not just confined to residing in big cities around the United States; they also reside in smaller municipalities and rural communities. This issue poses an important question relating to Law Enforcement agencies in smaller municipalities and rural communities. The question this research

paper will address is: Are smaller municipalities and rural communities doing enough to insure the safety of their citizens; also could and should more be done?

The intended method of inquiry for this research will include books, newspaper articles, and magazine articles. A survey of several small municipal and rural law enforcement agencies will be conducted in reference to this research of sex offenders and sexual predators in small municipalities and rural communities. It is anticipated that this research will show that law enforcement agencies in smaller municipalities and rural communities are doing enough, or all they can with time, resources, and manpower that they have to work with; to ensure the safety of their citizens and community. It is also anticipated that this research may show there is more that law enforcement in smaller municipalities and rural communities can do to further improve the safety of their citizens to help ensure that their citizens are being provided the safest possible living environment regarding sex offenders and sexual predators.

The intended benefit of this research is to provide small municipal and rural law enforcement agencies more ideas to utilize in the managing, monitoring, and tracking, of sex offenders and sexual predators within their municipalities. This research will further provide information to show the importance of managing, monitoring, and tracking, of sex offenders and sexual predators within small municipalities and rural communities. This research is not intended to suggest that law enforcement in small municipalities and rural communities are not doing enough to ensure the safety of their citizens, but to evaluate what law enforcement could do more to add to the managing, monitoring, and tracking of sex offenders and sexual predators.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Upon researching this topic, the researcher located several sources which helped to outline and identify more ideas and more ways to help manage, monitor, and track sex offenders and sexual predators. Although the research did not distinguish between a small municipality and a larger city in what would work or what would be the best practice for the management, monitoring, and tracking of sex offenders and sexual predators; the researcher was still able to utilize this information in regards for small municipalities and rural communities. The researcher took from the research the information that would be relevant in reference to this topic.

In the State of Texas, there are laws and guidelines regarding sex offender registration. These are located in chapter 62 of the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure. Every person who has the duty of registering sex offenders within their agency, whether in a large city or a small municipality, is familiar and follows this chapter of the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure. However, utilizing this research, the researcher believes there is more that can be done, beyond just following the Texas Law, by the individual person(s) who registers sex offenders and sexual predators, as well as the law enforcement agency as a whole.

Any person(s) who is tasked with registering sex offenders and sexual predators, has to at one point and time talk to the sex offenders and sexual predators that they are tasked to register; whether talking to them during the initial registration or talking to them if a person is new at registering sex offenders and sexual predators within an agency. When talking to these sex offenders and sexual predators, who will be residing in the community they register in, take the time to talk to these sex offenders and sexual predators in depth, beyond just for registration and verification purposes. Ask the sex

offender or sexual predator about the charge for which he has to register for (Cumming, 1997). By asking the sex offender or sexual predator about his charge, this allows the person(s) who will be monitoring the sex offender or sexual predator to observe more of the sex offender's or sexual predator's demeanor in reference to his sex offense that he is having to register for (Cumming, 1997). The more information that is known and gathered about the sex offenders and sexual predators that will be residing in the community, the better equipped the agency will be in managing, monitoring, and tracking of the sex offenders and sexual predators. When Police Officers gather information about a suspect involved in some type of criminal activity, it is always the best procedure to accumulate the most accurate background information possible so that an idea can be made about the suspects overall criminal background, for example violent behavior or a repeat offender for the same type of crime. Sex offenders and sexual predators are no different. Even though they have already been apprehended and prosecuted for their crime, sex offenders and sexual predators have a high percentage rate of repeat offenses.

Because registered sex offenders and sexual predators have to reside within the jurisdiction where they register, this places them throughout the various neighborhoods within the community. Another tactic to be utilized is to go to these various neighborhoods and check them. Check to see where the sex offender's or sexual predator's residence is exactly. Get familiar with the area and the people who reside in the neighborhood. In a small police department, it is understood that time is always an issue, especially when the person(s) that register sex offenders and sexual predators has other duties within the department, but this can be a very important tactic to utilize.

If this tactic takes a half a day to a full day to complete, even if it is once a month, once every two months, or once every quarter, this time spent will be very valuable in regards to ensuring the extra safety of the neighborhood.

LaFond (2005) mentions in his book the very well known case of Megan Kanka, a 7 year old girl who was brutally raped and murdered in 1994 by a twice convicted sex offender. In reference to the Megan Kanka case, Kanka's parents were not informed that sex offenders were living in a halfway house in their neighborhood (LaFond 2005). The Megan Kanka case shows the importance of taking the time to go to the neighborhoods where sex offenders and sexual predators are going to live or are living and checking the area and talking to the people in the neighborhood. Inform the people living in that neighborhood that a registered sex offender or sexual predator is moving into the neighborhood or is already living in the neighborhood. Even though these sex offenders are listed or are going to be listed on the State web site where the public can check the information for themselves, not everyone has a computer or checks the web site until they hear or see something in reference to a sex offender or sexual predators in their neighborhood, or until an incident happens and it is too late. By talking to the people in these neighborhoods and making them aware of a sex offender or sexual predator living in their neighborhood, the people will become more vigilant in their observation of this sex offender or sexual predator and will be more inclined to contact the law enforcement agency to report anything suspicious regarding this person.

Some law enforcement agencies even go to the neighborhoods and go door to door informing people that a registered sex offender or sexual predator lives in the neighborhood or is moving to the neighborhood and some use fliers to notify the

neighborhood (Bangor Daily News, 1 May, 2006). Some agencies only notify the neighborhood if the sex offender or sexual predator is classified as a high risk and some notify the neighborhood of all sex offenders or sexual predators living in the neighborhood or moving to the neighborhood (Bangor Daily News, 1 May, 2006). Some agencies notify the neighborhood in reference to sex offenders and sexual predators as part of their city ordinance (Bangor Daily News, 1 May, 2006).

Recently, several cities have started to adopt a city ordinance pertaining to areas in the community where sex offenders or sexual predators can or cannot reside. This is another useful tool in the managing, monitoring, and tracking of sex offenders and sexual predators. A city ordinance pertaining to the residency of sex offenders and sexual predators helps to protect areas where children normally collect and congregate. A city ordinance helps to regulate where sex offenders and sexual predators reside when the sex offender or sexual predator is not currently on parole or probation with stipulations. A city ordinance will help with compliance issues in regards to a sex offender's or sexual predator's residency.

Another tool that can be greatly utilized by a small municipality is that of community relations in regards to sex offenders and sexual predators. As earlier mentioned, the subject of sex offenders and sexual predators is a very popular subject and the public likes to be kept informed. Periodically a public meeting needs to be held with the community, lead by law enforcement, to keep the public up to date and informed about sex offenders and sexual predators residing in the community (Matravers, 2003). This public meeting needs to be open to where items can be discussed from a law enforcement perspective and that of the public's perspective

(Matravers, 2003). The meeting should also include any concerns and have a question and answer format for the public (Matravers, 2003). A periodical meeting can also be established with other surrounding law enforcement agencies, as well as parole, probation (both juvenile and adult), school officials, and local advocacy groups, to discuss the issues of sex offenders and sexual predators in the community (Matravers, 2003). This type of meeting is a great way to interact with other agencies as well as share viable information that could be useful to all agencies involved.

A law enforcement agency should also take the time to talk to the public when the public calls to a police department in regards to questions concerning sex offenders and sexual predators in the community. These citizens would not take the time to call in if they did not have concerns about their community and neighborhoods in which they reside. Their questions should be answered and the opportunity should be used to educate them further on the issue. This lets the public know that their concerns in regards to this issue is also shared by the law enforcement agency as well. This could also better educate the public by talking to them more on this issue than just answering their question and leaving it at that.

Law enforcement agencies also need to educate the children of the community. This can be done directly or indirectly. Directly would be talking to the children about their safety while out in their community. Law enforcement agencies could hold presentations for the children to help them understand the importance of their safety in the community. One way this could be done is with the help of school officials in regards to programs and presentations to the children. Let the children know that law enforcement is here to help them and that a top priority of law enforcement is their

personal safety. Indirectly would be educating the parents about the safety of their children. Educate the parents to always communicate with their children on this issue (Salter, 2003). Parents have to be able to listen to what their children are telling them, opening the lines of communication, and take that information as important (Salter, 2003). Also, educate the parents, as well as the children, about computer internet issues so that the children do not fall prey to on line solicitors (Dobbert, 2004). Parents need to be well informed, educated, and vigilant in regards to these issues, but they also have to restrain from taking these issues to the extreme to the point of paranoia of everyone in the community (Salter, 2003).

If law enforcement agencies are not educating the community for which they serve, about sex offenders and sexual predators, then the law enforcement agency is failing in their duties in regards to this issue (Police Department Disciplinary Bulletin, August, 2004). Law enforcement agencies have a duty to properly educate and inform the community on issues regarding sex offenders and sexual predators (Police Department Disciplinary Bulletin, August, 2004). Law enforcement agencies must also keep educating themselves, for example the officers within the department that may not know that much about these issues (Police Disciplinary Bulletin, August, 2004).

Another very important issue for law enforcement agencies is that of compliance checks, which is physically going out and making sure that the sex offenders and sexual predators in our community are living where they are supposed to be living, working where they are supposed to be working, and doing what they are supposed to be doing. This needs to be done as often as possible. Even though this is a very important aspect of the maintaining, monitoring, and tracking of sex offenders and sexual predators,

smaller law enforcement agencies don't do this enough. The two main excuses for this are time and manpower issues. These compliance checks are not done, for the most part, unless an issue about a sex offender or sexual predator is reported to the law enforcement agency (Dallas Morning News, 14 May, 2006). Law enforcement agencies that are doing compliance checks have reported a large number of sex offenders and sexual predators that are in violation regarding their registration duties as a sex offender or sexual predator upon conduction of these compliance checks (The Capital, 11 January, 2006). This means that for a while, the whereabouts of these registered sex offenders and sexual predators is unknown. If a law enforcement agency is not conducting proper compliance checks on their sex offenders and sexual predators, then the law enforcement agency may believe that they are current as to where each and every sex offender and sexual predator is living when this could not be the case. This poses a very dangerous safety issue if the sex offender is living in different neighborhoods than the neighborhood he is supposed to be living in, which goes against the things that the law enforcement agency is doing to ensure safety within the community.

Global Positioning System technology (GPS) has been adopted in several states across the country to track and monitor sex offenders and sexual predators (USA Today, 7 June, 2006). The State of Texas has tested this type of GPS technology, but has yet to implement any type of mandate for its use (USA Today, 7 June, 2006). With this type of technology being new, funds and availability will be issues for smaller municipalities, if and when it is mandated by the State of Texas, in reference to smaller agencies receiving this type of devices. Therefore, law enforcement agencies in small

municipalities will have to again rely on doing all they possibly can to manage, monitor, and track the sex offenders and sexual predators within their communities. This is why doing such things as regular (but not routine) compliance checks, education, familiarization, awareness, public assistance, and organization, is so important when tasked with the managing, monitoring, and tracking of sex offenders and sexual predators.

METHODOLOGY

The research question to be examined considers whether or not law enforcement in small municipalities and rural communities are doing enough to insure the safety of their citizens. Also, could and should more be done in regards to the managing, monitoring, and tracking of sex offenders and sexual predators in the community.

The researcher hypothesizes that law enforcement in small municipalities and rural communities are doing enough to insure the safety of their citizens by following state law and the guidelines set out in the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure. But, the researcher also hypothesizes that more could and should be done in regards to the managing, monitoring, and tracking of sex offenders and sexual predators in the community. By doing so, will only strengthen and reinforce the safety of the community as a whole in regards to this issue.

The method of inquiry will include: a review of books, newspaper articles, magazine articles, and a survey distributed to ten survey recipients.

The instrument that will be used to measure the researcher's findings regarding the subject of sex offenders and sexual predators in small municipalities and rural communities will include a survey.

The size of the survey will consist of 15 questions, distributed to ten survey participants from small and rural law enforcement agencies around the Texas Panhandle area.

The response rate to the survey instrument resulted in ten survey's being completed and sent back to the researcher.

The information obtained from the survey will be analyzed by reviewing, compiling, and calculating the data contained within the surveys.

FINDINGS

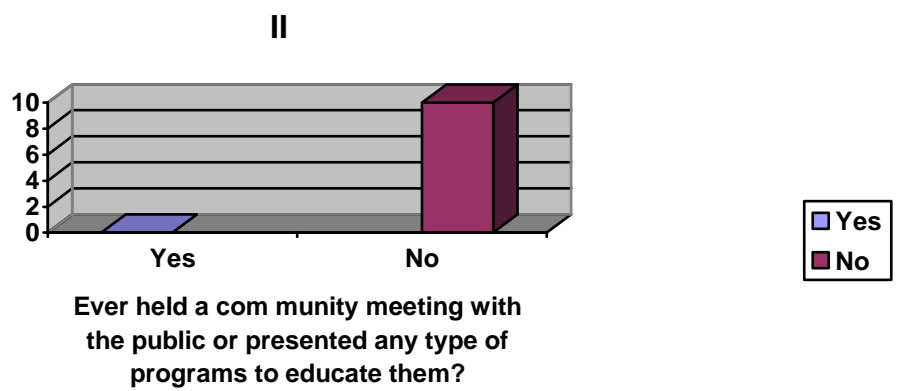
The researcher conducted a survey of ten small law enforcement agencies from areas with populations ranging from 6,500 to 22,000. The recipient law enforcement agencies reported personnel ranging from 13 to 34 sworn officers and had a range of 11 to 54 registered sex offenders or sexual predators living within their jurisdiction. Each law enforcement agency surveyed reported in the range of one to three people were assigned to the registration of sex offenders and sexual predators, which involves the verification, managing, monitoring, and tracking.



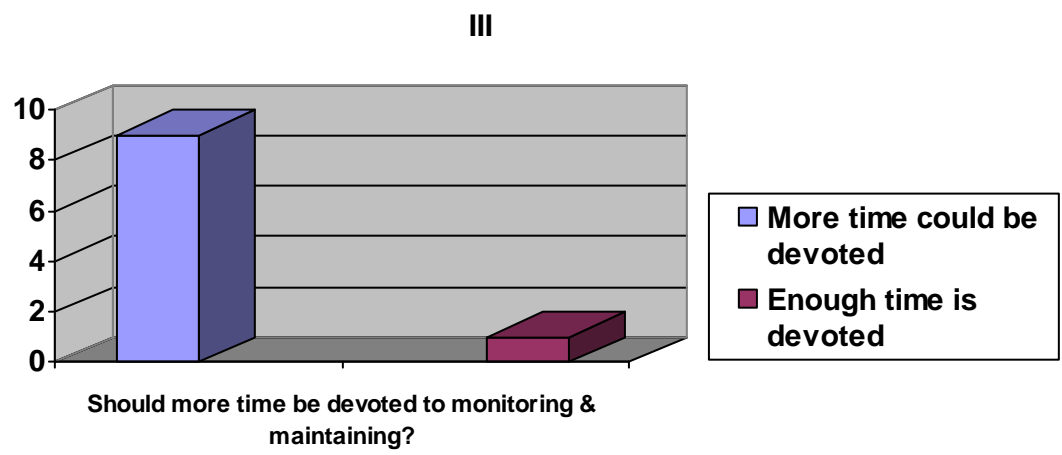
Out of the ten law enforcement agencies surveyed, five reported having enough people assigned to the registration of sex offenders and sexual predators and five reported not having enough assigned. Each and every one of the law enforcement agencies surveyed reported that the person(s) assigned to the registration of sex offenders and sexual predators have other duties within the department other than this duty.

Three out of ten law enforcement agencies surveyed stated that their agency does not conduct compliance checks on their sex offenders and sexual predators. Four out of the ten reported conducting compliance checks and two reported conducting compliance checks on or around Halloween only. One out of the ten reported doing compliance checks on an as needed basis only. Agencies reporting not doing compliance checks cited manpower issues and funding for lack of compliance checks.

On the issue of a city ordinance pertaining to sex offenders and sexual predators, nine out of the ten law enforcement agencies surveyed reported not having a city ordinance. One agency out of the ten did report having a city ordinance. Seven out of the nine, that reported not having a city ordinance, stated no intentions or plans to create and implement a city ordinance. One agency reported a maybe and one agency reported an unknown as to any intentions or plans to create and implement a city ordinance.



In regards to holding community meetings in reference to educating the public on sex offenders and sexual predators or presenting programs on the topic, all law enforcement agencies surveyed reported that they did not hold meetings or present any type of programs. Also, six agencies reported that they do have meetings with adult probation and parole in reference to sex offenders and sexual predators with four reporting no meetings with these entities at all.

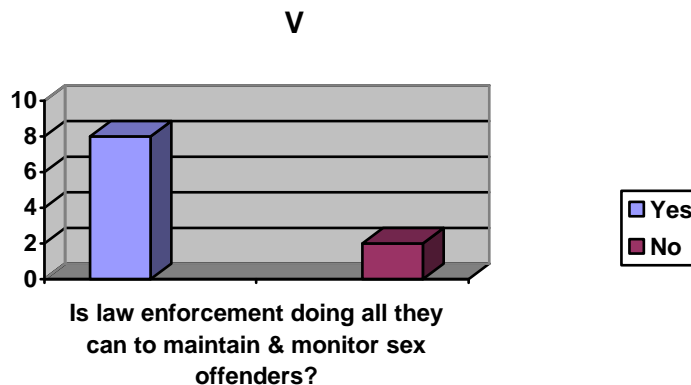


Is enough time being spent by law enforcement agencies on the maintaining and monitoring sex offenders and sexual predators within the community or

could more time be devoted to this task? Nine agencies out of the ten surveyed reported that more time should be devoted to the monitoring and maintaining of sex offenders and sexual predators with only one citing that enough time is being devoted. Even though more agencies believe that more time should be devoted, six agencies surveyed reported that it is easier to maintain and monitor sex offenders and sexual predators in a small rural community than a larger city. Three agencies reported that it is more difficult to maintain and monitor sex offenders and sexual predators in larger cities rather than the small rural communities and one cited that the size of the city is immaterial to the issue.



In reference to the possibility of a sex offender or a sexual predator within the community re-offending, all agencies surveyed reported that this is always a possibility. This finding is very important in the fact that all law enforcement agencies surveyed acknowledged that it was always a possibility that a sex offender or sexual predator could re-offend, which should re-enforce law enforcement's duty to do all that is possible to ensure the safety of the community.



Although the results were unanimous as to the possibility of sex offenders and sexual predators re-offending, six agencies reported that law enforcement is doing all they can to maintain and monitor sex offenders and sexual predators. Four agencies reported that more could be done.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The problem or issue examined by the researcher considered whether or not law enforcement in small municipalities and rural communities are doing enough to insure the safety of their citizens in regards to sex offenders and sexual predators. Also, could and should more be done in regards to managing, monitoring, and tracking of sex offenders and sexual predators in the community.

The purpose of this research was to examine if law enforcement in small municipalities and rural communities were doing everything necessary to ensure the safety of their citizens in regards to sex offenders and sexual predators. Also to be examined was if and what more should be done, other than guidelines listed in state law, to reinforce the safety of the community in regards to this issue.

The research question that was examined focused on what law enforcement was currently doing in regards to the managing, monitoring, and tracking of their sex

offenders and sexual predators to ensure the safety of their citizens and could and should these be improved, added to, and reinforced. The research also focused on how, what law enforcement were currently doing on these issues, they could be improved, added to, and reinforced, other than only doing what has to be done to adhere to state law.

The researcher hypothesized that law enforcement agencies in small municipalities and rural communities were doing enough, or all they could with the resources they have, to ensure the safety of their citizens and what was necessary to adhere to state law. However, the researcher also hypothesized that there is more that could and should be done to reinforce the safety of their citizens in regards to managing, monitoring, and tracking, of sex offenders and sexual predators living within their communities.

The researcher concluded from the findings that law enforcement agencies in small municipalities and rural communities are doing all they can, with the resources they have, in regards to managing, monitoring, and tracking, of sex offenders and sexual predators. The researcher concluded that law enforcement agencies are following and adhering to the state law regarding sex offender registration. The researcher also concluded that law enforcement agencies can and should do more in regards to managing, monitoring, and tracking of their sex offenders and sexual predators. Even though these agencies may be small in size, have manpower issues, and funding issues, there is still more that can be done by simply utilizing the resources that these agencies do have and organizing and managing their time towards this issue.

The findings of the research did support the hypothesis. The reason why the findings did support the hypothesis is probably due to law enforcement agencies knowing the importance of the managing, monitoring, and tracking of the sex offenders and sexual predators within their jurisdiction. Because it is always a possibility that a sex offender or a sexual predator could re-offend, it becomes even more important for these law enforcement agencies to do more in regards to this issue. Even though these agencies are small with limited resources, more can be done with these resources than what they are doing now and further than just adhering to state law. Not to say that these agencies are not presently doing enough to ensure the safety of their citizens, but when it pertains to sex offenders and sexual predators, who are a group that has a high re-offend percentage, then more should be done to reinforce community safety. Even with limited resources, which most small municipalities and rural communities have, more things, such as discussed in this research, can still be done by these agencies. By utilizing the resources these agencies do have and organizing and managing their time, these agencies can do much more to reinforce what they are doing to provide the safest possible living environment for their citizens within their communities regarding sex offenders and sexual predators. If more is done and it prevents just one person from becoming a victim or just one sex offender or sexual predator from re-offending in the community, then law enforcement in these communities are indeed striving for the safest possible living environment for their citizens.

The study of sex offenders and sexual predators in small municipalities and rural communities is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because of the importance of the safety to the citizens in reference to sex offenders and sexual predators who reside

in the community. As earlier stated, sex offenders and sexual predators have a high percentage rate of re-offending so it is very important that law enforcement agencies exhaust all resources, as well as ideas, to reinforce the safety of the community as a whole.

All small municipal and rural law enforcement agencies, with sex offenders and sexual predators residing within their communities, stands to be benefited by the results of this research. Not to be construed that these agencies are not doing enough now, but that there is always more that can be done, even with limited resources such as manpower, funding, or time issues.

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APPENDIX

1. What is the population of your city?
2. Department size?
3. How many registered sex offenders in your city?
4. How many people are assigned to register sex offenders?
5. What, if anything, does your department do extra to monitor the registered sex offenders in your city (besides the normal paperwork, like update forms, etc., required by the state)? For example: compliance checks
6. Does your city have a city ordinance regarding sex offenders?
7. If the answer is No to question #6, does your city plan to adopt a city ordinance regarding sex offenders?
8. Has your department ever held a community meeting with the citizens or presented any type of programs to educate them on registered sex offenders and / or the laws pertaining to sex offenders?
9. Do you think that there are enough people assigned within your department to register and monitor sex offenders?
10. Does the person(s) that register sex offenders within your department have other duties or just the registration of sex offenders?
11. Do you think that enough time is spent within your department on maintaining and monitoring registered sex offenders or do you believe that more time could and should be devoted to this?

12. Do you believe that the monitoring and maintenance of registered sex offenders is more difficult for a smaller rural agency than that of a larger city agency where they have a specific unit for that purpose? If so, briefly explain why.
13. Do you feel as though your agency is doing all it can in regards to the monitoring and maintenance of sex offenders, or do you feel as though more could be done?
14. Does your agency meet often with adult probation and / or parole in reference to the sex offenders within your city?
15. Do you feel as though there is always the possibility that at least one or more of the registered sex offenders within your city could re-offend?