

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

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Law Enforcement and Unmarked Patrol

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**An Administrative Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**

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August, 2003**

ABSTRACT

The 2000 Uniform Crime Report reveals Texas, as does the City of Humble, has a high rate of thefts, auto thefts, business/residential burglaries, robberies, property crimes and drug problems. A large number of these crimes occur with sufficient frequency in selected geographical areas during identifiable times of the day or night. Crime and the fear of it are major social issues and there is enormous public pressure for action. Viewed from this perspective unmarked patrol resources are simply one more tool for law enforcement.

A survey of 30 agencies, small medium and large reflect most departments do not use unmarked patrol. However, several agencies use unmarked patrol, on a full time basis and several agencies use unmarked patrol only when necessary where crime has increased, especially during holiday seasons. It appears some departments do not have the manpower or need to use unmarked patrol, mainly those departments in rural or low crime areas.

In conclusion, if law enforcement is to provide a quality environment for the citizens of our community, it becomes necessary to use innovative tactics and strategies to combat high crime areas. Because "Hot Spots", of crime are themselves, clustered, if crime can be substantially reduced communities can be made safer. Designing methods for blocking crime opportunities is the domain for situational crime prevention. Any movement toward increased concern with substantial problems is better than none at all.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1989 the Humble Police Department incorporated a crime suppression unit. The first year of existence the two-man unit made 62, felony arrests, 43 misdemeanor arrests and recovered \$205,843.03 in stolen property. Unfortunately, after only three-years, extenuating circumstances led to the disbandment of the unit.

Unmarked and/or specialized patrol can be an integral part of a department's success. If conducted properly, the planning process can contribute greatly to generating support for specialized operations, both within the department and the community it serves. As a general rule, specialized patrol should be considered when the efforts of uniformed patrol officers, no matter how well they are performing their duties, prove to be ineffective in coping with identified crime problems.

The Humble Police Department responds to a large index of crimes regarding;

- auto thefts
- vehicle burglaries
- business burglaries
- drug problems

A large percentage of these crimes occur with sufficient frequency in selected geographical areas, during identifiable times of the day or night. Unfortunately, while uniformed officers respond to numerous calls for service these areas do not receive adequate proactive police patrol. Consequently, these target areas are vulnerable to a number of criminal activities.

The purpose for this research is to assist the Humble Police Department in improving the productivity of patrol operations, the single most costly aspect of policing. Furthermore, to present specific recommendations regarding the planning, implementation, development, tactics, and evaluation of specialized patrol operations. Additionally, this project will show the essential interrelationship between routine patrol and specialized patrol. Each represent a different approach to the attainment of similar goals, in conjunction with one another. The methods used to gather the necessary information for this research include data and research from books on specialized patrol operations, previous LEMIT research papers, the National Criminal Justice Reference Service and interviews with law enforcement agencies in various areas that currently conduct specialized patrol operations.

Once completed, it is anticipated this research will provide credible information and persuasive documentation, to justify and/or support the need to incorporate a specialized patrol division within the Humble Police Department. Furthermore, the outcome of this research can provide innovative techniques, tactical advantages and strategic objectives to combat and disrupt crime patterns targeted by the unit. The Humble Police Department and many other law enforcement agencies can benefit from specialized patrol operations in a variety of ways, to include;

- reduce uniform patrol workload
- improve patrol productivity
- increased in progress arrests
- lateral transfer opportunities
- answering community problems

In addition, the incorporation of innovative law enforcement strategies to fight crime will send a message to the community that the Humble Police Department is taking suitable measures and using every available resource to combat crime.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Police operations refers to the various police services provided citizens and the methods used by police agencies when delivering these services. They are called upon to do many things. They are the most accessible of all governmental agencies, and they operate continuously, 24 hours a day, in most jurisdictions. Increasingly, the public has come to depend more on the police to solve their problems, regardless of the nature of the problem. Police services are delivered by a variety of operational units within the police department. The number and nature of these units depends on the department's size, workload, and the community being policed. The vast majority of police services or operational activities emanate from three units, patrol, criminal investigations and traffic. The patrol function is considered to be the most important operation of a law enforcement agency. Noted scholar and former Chicago Police Chief, O. W. Wilson, has described it as "the backbone of policing" (Wilson & McClaren, 1977). This is because patrol is the primary unit responsible for answering calls, providing police services and preventing crime. Patrol strategies are developed in an attempt to better respond to calls for service, deter crime, or apprehend criminals once crimes have occurred. Throughout much of the twentieth century, there was only one strategy, routine preventive patrol. Based on research that questioned the effectiveness of random patrol as a method to repress or prevent crime, administrators have developed different strategies for deployment and use

of officers.

Traditionally, undercover operations are more characteristic of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The FBI began using undercover agents in criminal investigations in 1972, following J. Edgar Hoover's death. Additionally, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), Internal Revenue Service (IRS), and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), incorporated, undercover divisions. The Commissions on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (1967) urged every major city to establish "a special intelligence unit solely to ferret out organized crime," and the Kenner Commission (1968) called on cities to develop intelligence units that would use undercover police personnel and informants to learn about actual or potential civil disorders.

In many local law enforcement departments, undercover work has come to be seen as an important and innovative tactic, carried out by carefully chosen, elite units. There is direct evidence in the expansion of undercover methods in changing local arrest patterns. Between 1960 and 1980, arrest for offenses where undercover tactics are often used rose from 5.8 to 10.8 percent of the total. There was a significant increase in arrests for narcotics, prostitution and commercial vice, fraud, and possessing and receiving stolen property. The expansion and change in the nature of undercover work has been neither uniform across agencies and types of offenses nor perfectly linear over time.

At the local level, the uniformed patrol is and will remain the predominant means of carrying out police work. Even at the federal level, undercover means are only one of several prominent investigative means. Undercover means have become a prominent and sophisticated part of the arsenal of American law enforcement. Most of the municipal

departments initially had limited or no formal provisions for crime detection. They were at a disadvantage in dealing with consensual crimes and those carried out by skilled conspirators. As the editor of the Chicago Tribune put it in 1857, “the present [uniformed] police force is no doubt as good and efficient a body of men as is needed for the preservation of order...but for the purpose of catching clever and experienced rouses, they are useless, and it is unreasonable to expect them to be otherwise.”

At times, restructuring of a department, its process and personnel assignments, are required, to address the desires and concerns of the community. Certainly the typical citizen is happy when the bad guy is caught and incarcerated, but they would be happier if the crime had never occurred. Crime and the fear of it are major social issues, and there is enormous public pressure for action. Viewed from this perspective, undercover means are simply one more tool for law enforcement.

Recently, directed patrols, proactive arrest and problem-solving at high-crime “hot spots” has shown substantial evidence of crime prevention. Police can prevent robbery, disorder, gun violence, drunk driving and domestic violence, but only by using certain methods under certain conditions. These conclusions are based largely on research supported by the National Institute of Justice, the research arm of the Office of Justice Programs in the U.S. Department of Justice. In recent years, increasing numbers of police executives have incorporated these findings into their crime prevention strategies. University of Wisconsin law professor Herman Goldstein’s (1979) paradigm of “problem-oriented policing” directed research attention to the proximate causes of public safety problems. The Justice Department’s adoption of this perspective had yielded an increasingly complex but useful body of knowledge about how policing affects crime.

Most places have no crimes and most crime is highly concentrated in and around a relatively small number of places. If we prevent crime at these high crime places, then we might be able to reduce total crime. Concentration of crime at places is predicted by routine activity theory (Cohen and Felson 1979; Felson 1994) and offender search theory (Brantingham and Brantingham 1981). Some of the original evidence for clustering of crime at places was found in Boston (Pierce, Spaar and Briggs 1986) and Minneapolis (Sherman, Gartin and Buerger 1989). Additional evidence for crime concentration at places has been found for specific types of crime. Crow and Bull (1975) noted over 20 years ago that most convenience stores have no or few robberies, but few have many robberies. In England and Canada a growing body of research has revealed that in high burglary neighborhoods most residences have no burglaries, but a few residences suffer repeated burglaries (Forrester et. Al 1988 Forrester et. Al 1990; Polvi et. Al. 1990; Farrell 1995). Ten percent of the fast food restaurants in San Antonio, Texas account for one third of property crimes at such restaurants (Spelman,1995b). Because hotspots of crime are themselves clustered, if crime at these few places can be substantially reduced, communities can be made safer. Designing methods for blocking crime opportunities is the domain for Situational Crime Prevention (Clarke,1992; 1995).

The San Diego Sheriff's Department received a two-year grant to establish a special antifencing unit to combat property crimes. By the second year, officers made 46 arrest and recovered \$220,000 worth of property. The Detroit Police Department conducted an undercover sting operation were an estimated net of \$10 million in property was recovered and \$9 million in narcotics seized. Ninety percent of the property was returned to its rightful owners and the rest destroyed or sold at auction. With the

significant increase in reports on drug dealings, and especially the dealing of crack, the Vancouver Police Department organized several plainclothes operations to identify the drug dealers. Community members willingly opened their homes to police officers as observation Points. In Florida, the Winter Garden Police Department has a special unit to supplement the efforts of the Patrol Division and Criminal Investigations, without having to pull officers away from their patrol and investigative duties. The unit is used to provide additional patrol, or surveillance, in specific areas and will be used to identify and target specific problems, such as burglaries, auto thefts, etc., that exist within a localized area of the city.

The University of California Police Department has both uniform and plain-clothes operations to provide a full range of police related services. In Louisiana, the LSU Police Department fields a plain-clothes unit of police officers that provide foot patrol coverage of the campus. The Hollywood Police Department has a Crime Suppression Unit (CSU) which targets street level crimes, such as: prostitution and related vice crimes, narcotics, robberies, burglaries, and violations that reduce the quality of life for a neighborhood. The CSU is an example of the Hollywood Police Department's efforts to make the most efficient use of available resources. Additionally the University of Whitewater Police Department uses unmarked patrol to combat crime in selected areas.

In Texas, the Austin Police Department (APD) uses unmarked patrol to fight crime in targeted areas where auto thefts, burglaries, robberies and drug related offenses often occur. APD uses several different unmarked vehicles including a yellow taxicab. The Frisco and Bridgeport, Texas Police Departments use unmarked patrol on a need to basis. Both agencies use Unmarked Patrol when the efforts of uniform patrol is

ineffective in selected areas where crime has risen. In Dallas, the police department received numerous complainants about vehicle thefts and vehicle burglaries. Dallas P. D., responded by using unmarked/plain clothes officers to patrol the area (Dallas, News Channel 5).

The most frequently cited and perhaps most in-depth study of the effectiveness of routine preventive patrol was conducted by the Kansas City, Missouri Police Department (Kelling, 1972). The patrol study has been the focus of much debate and controversy. Some have mistakenly interpreted the study to mean that the police have no effect on crime. To the contrary, it merely points out that routine patrol has minimal effects on crime (Cordner & Trojanowicz, 1992). The study also implies that specialized, aggressive patrol tactics should be considered as more appropriate tool to combat crime problems. Within this context, it is perhaps more important to focus on how police spend their time. Restructuring patrol activities can indeed become an effective way of combating crime (Worden, 1993; Krajick, 1980; Wilson & McLaren, 1977). Additionally, the Kansas City patrol study found 60 percent of the department's patrol time is uncommitted (only 40 percent of the time were officers working on a call or other activity). This is not uncommon. Cordner (1982) found the patrol time for a medium-sized police agency to be 54 percent, and Whitaker (1982) in a study of 24 agencies found about two-thirds of patrol time was uncommitted. When this amount of patrol time exist, the administration might reduce patrol time by reassigning some officers to directed patrol activities. The reduction of patrol or uncommitted time from 60 percent to 40 percent probably would not reduce patrol's effectiveness, but it would make additional personnel available for other assignments. Indeed, when officers are properly

deployed and the workload is being managed by the department, patrol time can effectively be reduced to 25 percent or less.

During the 1970's, the Kansas City Police Department formalized a process by implementing person oriented patrol on known suspects or classes of individuals. The program consisted of officers conducting intensive surveillance on known robbers (Pate, Bowers & Parks, 1976). The idea was that officers would concentrate on dangerous felons, observe them committing a criminal act, and arrest them once they committed a crime. Even though the program was labor intensive, it was believed that a substantial reduction in the robbery rate, and possibly other criminal activity, could be achieved by concentrating on known, habitual robbers who committed a disproportionately high number of robberies. This program did increase the frequency of arrests for the robbers, but most of the arrests were for drug violations.

The New York City Police Department Street Crime Unit (SCU) was organized in 1971. In 1977 it was designated one of LEAA's exemplary projects and thus subject to evaluation. Several hundred specialty trained officers were deployed on a monthly basis to precincts in New York City with high levels of street crime. Using plainclothes surveillance and decoy tactics, the units attempted to arrest suspects in the act of committing crimes. The SCU made 4,413 arrests in 1974; 90 percent of these included a felony charge with two-thirds of them for robbery or grand larceny from a person. Crime patterns and enforcement priorities in recent years have been conducive to increased undercover work. This is true for traditional street crime (which increased significantly from the 1960's to the 1970's) as well as for more sophisticated white-collar crime.

In 1989 the City Of Humble Police Department formed a Crime

Suppression Unit (CSU). Initially, the CSU consisted of two officers and within a year gained a third officer. The unit was productive and made many in-progress arrests of both misdemeanor and felony suspects. The unit concentrated on high crime areas like the mall, shopping center parking lots, apartment complexes, and other areas where suspicious activity was reported. Many arrests came by way of surveillance by the CSU officers. Houston News Channel 11 reporter Charles Hadlock reported how effective the unit had become. When the story was aired the police department received praise from the community. Several notable arrests were covered in the local Humble Observer News paper such as: the apprehension of two aggravated robbery suspects, one arrest that cleared 12 robberies in two counties (Gayle, 1990), two arrests for thefts from a vehicle (Swope, 1989), three arrests for burglary of a motor vehicle (Swope, 1989); one arrest of a suspect during an attempted auto theft (Kelly, 1991); and one arrest of a store clerk for selling of alcohol to minors (Swope, 1989). This arrest came after complainants from several parents that their children were buying beer at the store.

A survey of police departments found that there is some variation in the way Person-oriented patrol projects are implemented (Spelman, 1990). They generally fall into several categories, such as; pre-arrest targeting where officers used surveillance and stakeouts to apprehend suspects before or while committing a criminal act. In the crime triangle, location is a critical element. Weisburd (1997) notes how criminal justice researchers and practitioners have only recently begun to focus on places where offenses occur in addition to people who commit them. One result of this shift has been the identification of hot spots, a term borrowed from geology to designate a region of potentially volatile geologic, or volcanic activity. Hot spots are specific locations with

high crime rates. Taylor (1998) explains: A hot spot may be a single address, a cluster of addresses close to one another, a segment of a streetblock, an entire streetblock or two, or an intersection.

Waiting for a crime to occur has been compared to “closing the stable door after the horse has gone.” The goal of a preventive operation is either to prevent a crime from occurring or to prevent harm if it does occur. Some police departments have not changed their operating philosophy procedures for 30 or 40 years. Others are at the cutting edge of advancement, with talented personnel in key positions and rank-and-file officers with great potential, all of whom are hungry for more effective ways in which to operate. Eck and Spelman, (1987) having struggled with the meaning of “effectiveness” developed a helpful formulation by identifying five varying degrees of impact that police might have on a problem: (1) totally eliminating it; (2) reducing the number of incidents it creates; (3) reducing the seriousness of the incidents it creates; (4) designing methods for better handling the incidents; and (5) removing the problem from police consideration. Some problems can be eliminated. If this can be achieved, given the nature of most police work, both the police and the community have a great sense of accomplishment.

The traditional approach to policing fits the job term “law enforcement” with precision, however, it falls short of meeting community needs because it does little to prevent crimes from occurring. Increasingly, it was possible to document the limited effectiveness of many traditional strategies and tactics, thereby encouraging the search for new and better means. Any movement toward increased concern with substantive problems is better than none at all. Specialized patrol methods are recognized as a necessity today and most large departments are using some form of specialized

patrolling. The year 2000 the Uniform Crime Report for Texas, shows there were 93,161 auto thefts, 637,522 Larceny/Thefts, 74,302 Robberies, 188,975 Burglaries, and 919,658 Property Crimes. In the year 2001 the Uniform Crime Report shows in Humble, Harris County, Texas there were 216 (18 per month) auto thefts, 156 (13 per month) Burglaries and 879 (73.25 per months) Thefts.

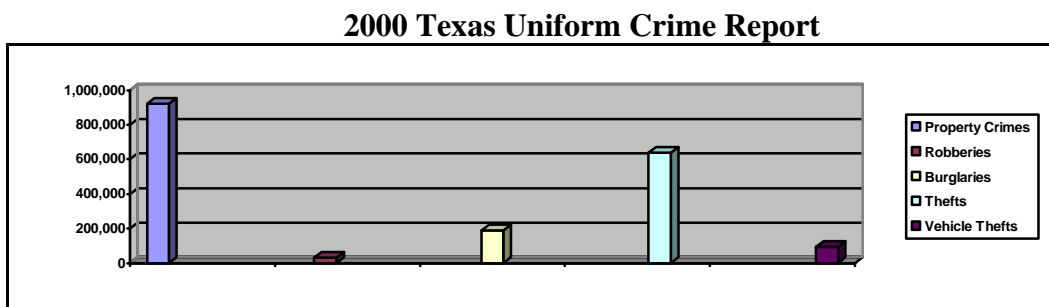


Figure 1. 2000 Texas Uniform Crime Report

METHODOLOGY

Does the Humble Police Department respond to a high volume of calls in selected locations? Can the Humble Police Department uniformed patrol effectively respond to these calls and deter crime by their mere presence? And, does the Humble Police Department need Unmarked and/or Specialized Patrol to assist uniformed patrol in high crime areas? This research establishes the answers to each of these questions. It is hypothesized that Humble Police Department should incorporate Unmarked Patrol to assist uniformed patrol officers. It is also hypothesized Unmarked Patrol will free up patrol officers to more effectively respond to calls for service, providing overall quality service to the community. Data and information were gathered from books, web sites, news articles, phone interviews and two separate surveys.

A survey was conducted within the Humble Police Department and of 44 surveys handed out, 28 (56%) were returned. Additionally, a survey was sent to 30 police departments in Texas, 23 (64%), of which responded to the survey. Geographically, agencies were surveyed in various areas throughout Texas. No particular geographical area was surveyed for this research. The survey was intended to reach a cross sections of Texas in an effort to learn the logistics of different police departments and the type of crimes in their respective areas. Departments surveyed vary in size form 14 to 1300 officers with populations ranging from 5000 to 8 million, people. The surveys asked outside departments about the use of unmarked/specialized patrol units. The Humble survey questioned officers about their interest in using an unmarked patrol unit.

This information was analyzed and reflects the demands on uniformed patrol and the expectation of the public and how difficult it is to meet the expectations of the public to deter and resolve all areas of crime. Also, this information reveals the effectiveness of Unmarked/Specialized Patrol. Additionally, information obtained supports the need for the Humble Police Department to use Unmarked Patrol to combat high crime areas where uniformed patrol are unable to be effective.

FINDINGS

Traditionally, most local agencies do not use unmarked patrol. However, several department's use unmarked patrol on a full time basis and several departments, use unmarked patrol only when necessary to combat areas where crime has increased, especially during holiday seasons. Of the 30 police departments surveyed, seven departments have unmarked patrol and 17departments, do not. Five departments have full

time units and 2 departments use unmarked patrol on a part time basis. Nineteen departments indicated they respond to a large number of auto thefts, vehicle burglaries, business burglaries and thefts. Thirteen departments are interested in adopting an unmarked patrol unit while 4 departments, are not. Seven departments claim unmarked patrol units have reduced crime in their communities. Twelve departments feel unmarked patrol would help in high crime areas, 2 departments, do not and 3 are unsure.

30 Agencies Surveyed

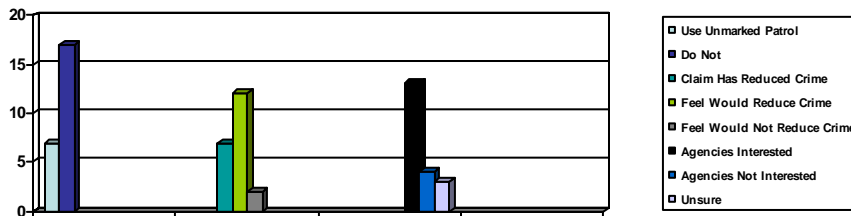


Figure 2. Survey of 30 Texas Police Agencies

Several agencies surveyed by personal interview use unmarked patrol full time, due to areas where high crime are of concern. On the survey conducted at the Humble Police Department the results reveal 26 officers feel Unmarked Patrol is needed while 2 do not. Twenty-seven officers believe Unmarked Patrol will be effective in Humble. Asked if unmarked patrol would be well received by the community, 25 officers said yes, 1 no and 2 were unsure.

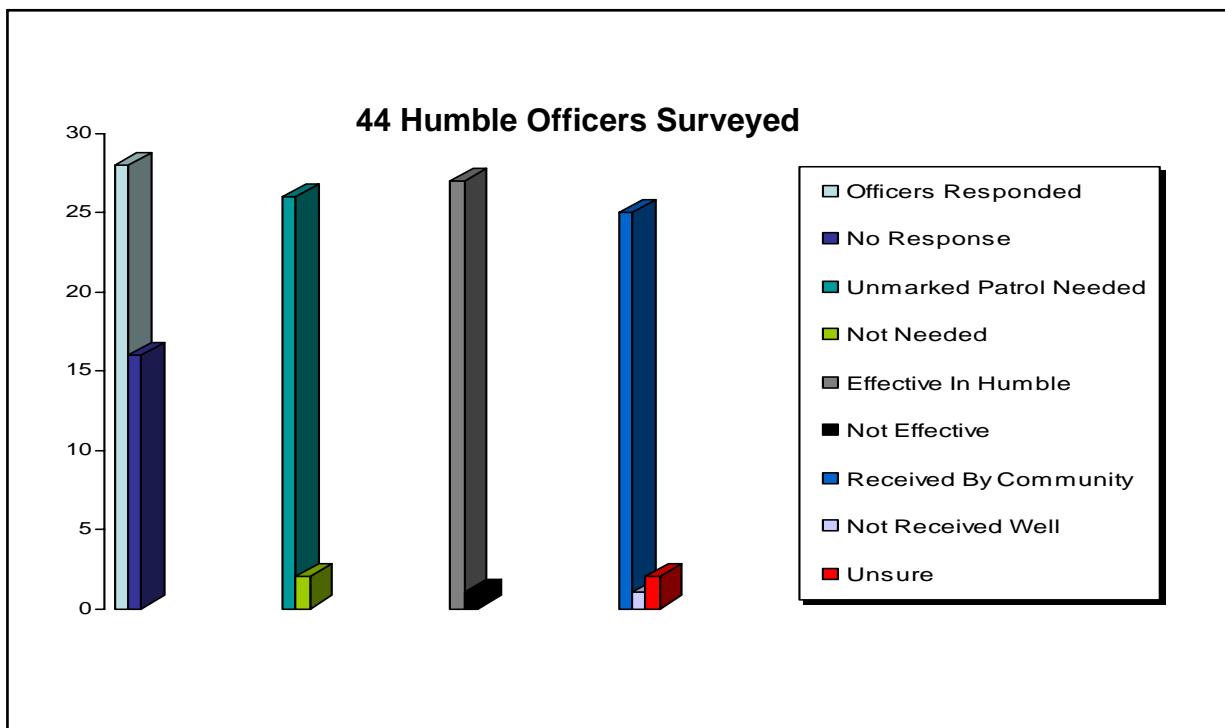
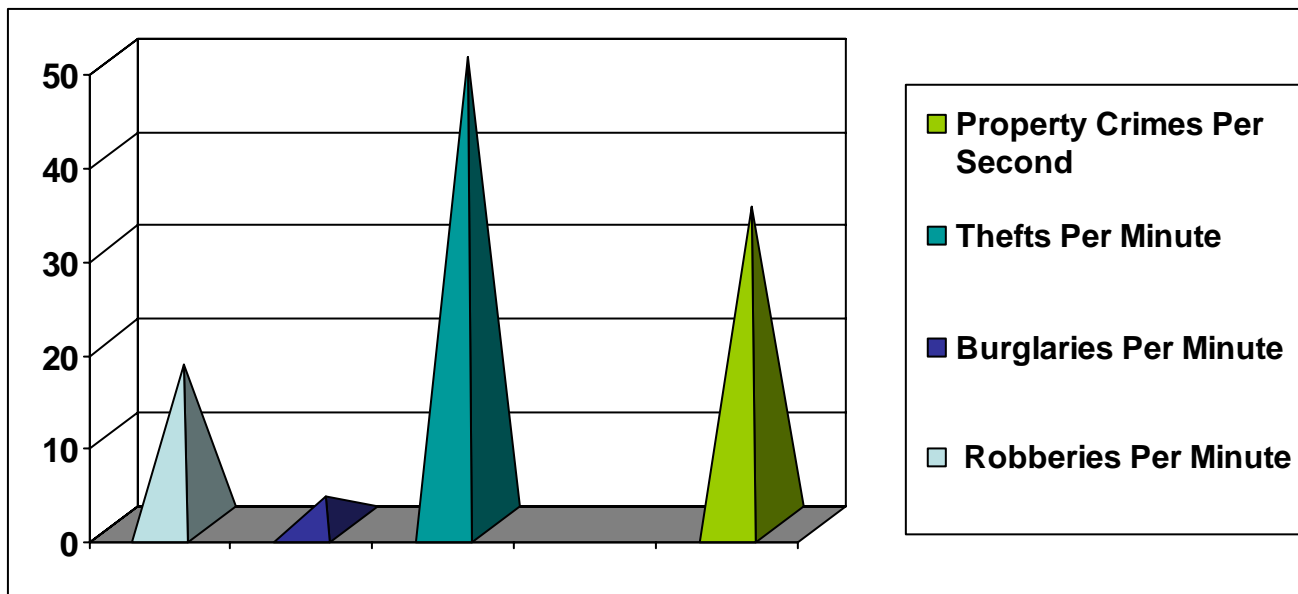


Figure 3. Survey of Humble Police Officers

The 2000 Uniform Crime Report (UCR) for the State Of Texas disclosed there were 919,658 Property Crimes, 30,257 Robberies, 188,975 Burglaries, 637,522 Larceny/Theft and 93,161 Vehicle Thefts. The 2000 Humble Police Department annual crime report disclosed there were 879 Thefts, 156 Burglaries, and 216 Auto Thefts in Humble. The 2000 Texas Crime Clock, a representation of UCR data, represents the annual ratio of crime to fixed time intervals. As goes crime in the state of Texas, there is 1-Robbery, every 17 minutes, 1-Burglary, every 3 minutes, 1-Larceny/Theft, every 50 seconds, 1-MotorVehicle Theft, every 6 minutes and 1- Property Crime every 34 seconds.

State of Texas Uniform Crime Report



DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

The Humble Police Department responds to a large index of crimes concerning auto thefts, vehicle burglaries, business/residential burglaries and drug problems. A large percentage of these crimes occur with sufficient frequency in selected geographical areas, during identifiable times of the day or night. Unfortunately, while uniformed officers respond to numerous calls for service these areas do not receive adequate proactive police patrol. Consequently, these target areas are vulnerable to a number of criminal activities. This research examines the need for the Humble Police Department to use unmarked patrol. Currently, the Humble Police Department uses unmarked patrol whenever, necessary, especially, during the holiday seasons and at times where crime has increased in selected areas. This research project addresses the questions: Does the Humble Police

Department respond to a high volume of calls in selected areas? Can the Humble Police Department uniformed patrol effectively respond to these calls and deter crime by their mere presence? And does the Humble Police Department need Unmarked and/or Specialized patrol, to assist, uniformed patrol in high crime areas?

It is hypothesized there is a need to use unmarked patrol to target high crime areas in Humble. It is also, hypothesized the Humble Police Department should establish a specialized unit to concentrate on “Hot Spot”, areas to help improve uniformed patrol operations, the single most costly aspect of policing. Potentially, many in progress arrests can be made apprehending would be criminals, better protecting life and property providing a safer community environment. As a general rule, specialized patrol should be considered when the efforts of uniformed patrol officers, no matter how well they are performing their duties, prove to be ineffective in coping with identifiable crime problems.

Research reveals the state of Texas has a high rate of criminal activities where uniformed police officers respond and perhaps spend a great deal of their duty time taking reports, interviewing victims, witnesses and collecting crime scene evidence. Traditionally, undercover operations are more characteristic of federal agencies. However, in many local law enforcement departments, specialized patrol has come to be seen as an important and innovative tactic. Research, also, reveals at times restructuring of a department, its personnel assignments, are required to address the desires and concerns of the community. Between 1960 and 1980, arrests for offenses where specialized patrol tactics are often used rose from 5.8 to 10.8 percent of the total.

Uniformed patrol is and will remain the predominant means of carrying out police

work. The present uniformed police force is no doubt as good and efficient a body of men as is needed for preservation of order but for the purpose of catching clever and experienced criminals, they are useless, and it is unreasonable to expect them to be otherwise. Although, few agencies use unmarked/specialized patrol operations it has become a prominent and sophisticated part of the arsenal of American law enforcement. It is recommended that the Humble Police Department restructure patrol assignments to implement a specialized patrol unit. Previously, the department had a noticeable reduction in crime when using unmarked patrol. Additionally, there were more arrests made, and a reduction in the uniform patrol work load.

Officers selected to the specialized unit will drive unmarked cars and dress in plain clothes. The specialized unit should be used to target high crime areas and will require officers to adjust their hours to act in response to the different times crimes occur. The unit should maintain records to identify "Hot Spot", areas in addition to the people who commit crimes, to be more successful opposed to riding random unmarked patrol. The unit can provide additional patrol, or surveillance, in specific areas and will be used to identify and target specific problems, such as burglaries, auto thefts, etc., that exist within a localized area of Humble.

In conclusion, previously, the Humble Police Department used a full time unmarked unit which proved to be successful. Utilizing unmarked patrol will help free up uniformed patrol officers to more effectively respond to calls for service. Additionally, a survey reflects the majority of officers within the department believe unmarked patrol is necessary and will benefit both the department and community. Currently the department has two unmarked vehicles acquired from seizures. Both vehicles are used only when

needed for specialized patrol or used for officers transportation needs. Both vehicles are insured, provided routine maintenance and fueled at cost to the city. There is no additional cost to the department to implement the unit. Other departments can benefit from this research discovering innovative strategies to combat similar problems they experience. Agencies interested in utilizing unmarked patrol may consider using seizure vehicles, apply for grant money or discuss with a local car dealership about donating or borrowing used cars for a specialized unit.

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