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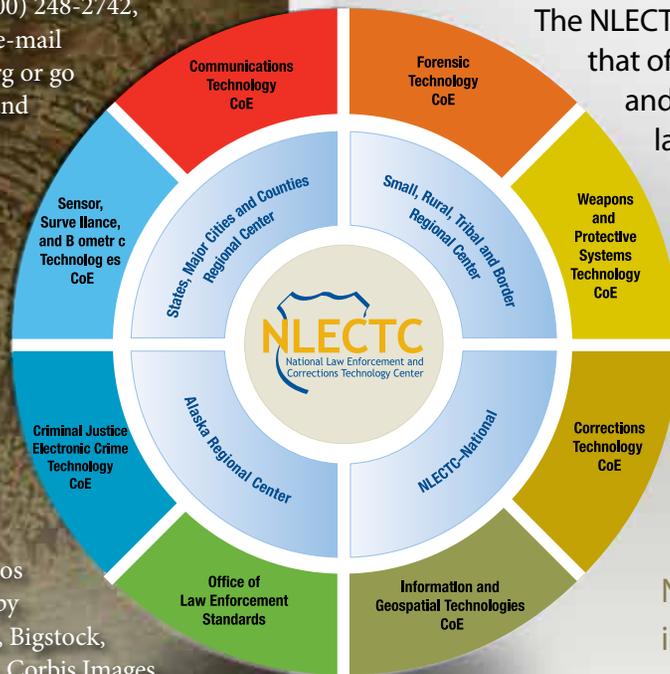
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Managing GANGS In Schools

Gang activity in the United States is unlimited in its reach. It cuts across urban, suburban and rural jurisdictions and filters into schools. Actions that schools and law enforcement can take to thwart gang activity was the subject of a presentation at a recent school safety conference.

Cpl. Mike Rudinski is a school resource officer (SRO) with the Hyattsville City Police Department in Maryland, assigned to Northwestern High School. He has been an SRO for 12 of his 26 years as a police officer, and is on the board of the Maryland Association of School Resource Officers. He spoke at the 2011 Mid-Atlantic School Safety Conference sponsored by the Office of Justice Programs' National Institute of Justice (NIJ) in conjunction with the School Safety Advocacy Council (SSAC).

Hyattsville, in Prince George's County, is a city of 17,500 about five miles outside of Washington, D.C. Northwestern High School draws students from several areas and has a diverse student body of 2,500 students.

"This presentation is not about any one city, county, community, ethnicity, race, gender or creed," Rudinski says. "This is about society. This is about young people and why they do what they do today."

The *2011 National Gang Assessment, Emerging Trends,* from the National Gang Intelligence Center, found that there are 33,000 officially designated gangs in the United States, with 1.4 million members. Rudinski believes the estimate could be low because local jurisdictions that provide the information to the FBI may be underreporting gang activity.

The center is composed of representatives from several federal agencies, including the FBI, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the Drug Enforcement Administration.

Rudinski says a gang is defined as three or more people that have a commonality such as a name, territory or location, and engage in criminal behavior. Gangs in the U.S.

"My school serves seven separate ZIP codes, so we have kids who don't see each other any time of the day or any time of the year except for in school during the school day," Rudinski explains. "People wonder why a gang may exist inside of a school and nowhere else. When kids go home, they are not appearing to be a gang member, but when they come into schools where their friends are, or when they are on the streets, they have to survive, so they exhibit these behaviors."

Rudinski says sometimes changes by schools to suspension or expulsion policies in reaction to the "persistently dangerous school" component of the federal No Child Left Behind law can make it harder to rid schools of offending students. The law allows parents to transfer students if schools are determined to be persistently dangerous based on definitions created by each state, and schools want to avoid the persistently dangerous label.

Young people who want to leave a gang often have a difficult time because of fear of retribution, a code against "snitching" and an entrenched intergenerational association with gangs.

"I used to talk a lot about how young people join gangs, and it's turning more and more into a family affair and a generational situation," Rudinski explains. "We are now finding young people that are saying, 'I can't get out; my whole family is involved.' It's so all-encompassing for them, they don't know any way out."

Why Do They Join?

Reasons cited by experts as to why young people join gangs include love, money, respect, discipline, belonging, identity and recognition. Rudinski says these factors are important, but he believes the main reason is bullying.

"The more I am in schools the more I think everything revolves around bullying. They join for protection," he says.

Gangs use violence to create fear. For young people, fear means respect. Gangs recruit through subterfuge, such as countering their criminal activities with good works in the community; seduction of a glamorous

range from large, national organizations to small neighborhood groups. According to the county police gang unit, Prince George's County, with a population of 863,000, has more than 390 neighborhood "crews," which essentially operate as gangs, although they may not use that term.

"The only thing that limits being a gang and not being a gang is what you believe," says Rudinski. "And it doesn't matter what you believe, it only matters what they believe, because if they think they are dangerous, they're going to be dangerous. If they think they are a gang, they will be a gang. Schools serve your communities, and if gangs are in communities, they are going to be in the schools."

Schools can present a target-rich environment for gang activity such as drugs, robbery and extortion. Parents may be unaware of their child's gang involvement until they are contacted by the school.

> **"The more I am in schools the more I think everything revolves around bullying. They join for protection. "**
>
> *–Cpl. Mike Rudinski, Hyattsville City Police Department.*

lifestyle; obligation and coercion. Some teens will seek out a gang on their own.

Rudinski notes that prejudice and misunderstanding and distrust of other cultures fosters gang development. Young people come into schools from various neighborhoods, communities or countries. They are picked on because of race, material possessions and language.

He says mass media and pervasive violent images have a powerful influence on teens. Music, television, movies, magazines, video games and Internet sites are full of violent messages. Often parents have no idea what their children are listening to, viewing or reading.

Prevention Strategies

Actions school police officers, administrators and staff can take to alleviate and discourage gang activity include the following:

- Ban anything related to gang membership including weapons, violence, illegal activity and gang-identified clothing, insignias and gestures. Staff can expect to be tested constantly by the subtle and changing forms of gang symbols. Confiscate questionable items such as bandannas and sports apparel that may indicate gang involvement.

- Administrators must communicate clear, consistent standards.

- Control all entrances to the school. Vigorously monitor outside as well as inside areas.

- Be alert to the presence of strangers in or around the building and challenge people as to why they are there.

- Adults and authority figures need to be highly visible.

- Reduce the time between classes and discourage loitering.

- Implement a dress code designed to eliminate gang colors and clothing. Possibly adopt school uniforms, but choose a neutral color such as white, black or khaki. Ask the students about colors before implementing a uniform policy. "Kids have to walk home and they will get beat up if they are wearing a particular color," Rudinski explains.

- Establish partnership academies, schools within schools, alternative schools or in-school suspension programs.

- Establish ongoing professional development and in-service training programs for all school employees, including techniques in cultural diversity. Make training deadlines realistic to allow enough time for training to be conducted by often limited numbers of staff.

- Conduct leadership training classes to assist students.

- Create a climate of ownership and school pride, including students, parents, teachers and community leaders, in the safe-school planning process. "This is where we run into denial," Rudinski notes. "People don't want to say there is a gang problem because if you say there is a gang problem then real estate values are going to go down. We have to get it across and we have to use the word gang."

- Stage regular campuswide graffiti and vandalism clean-up campaigns and clean-up rallies in response to specific incidents of defacement and destruction. Remove graffiti immediately.

- Organize crisis intervention teams to counsel students coping with troubling violence in and near school. Include peer mediation if possible.

- Offer students, especially juvenile gang members, special outreach and afterschool programs as an alternative to gang membership. "Kids come to school because they see some shimmer of light in that building," Rudinski says. "The ones that actually come in the building are there for a reason and you have to find it and occupy them."

- Give students respect and exhibit genuine concern. Many join gangs to gain respect from peers and to receive a feeling of belonging. The gang replaces family structure that is missing for many students. "I try to find what the kids need and substitute it," Rudinski

says. "We talk about having sons and daughters at our school. If a kid needs a father figure I'll be the father figure. Whatever they need and whatever the desire that is causing them to lean toward the gang lifestyle, we will try to substitute and pull them away from the gang lifestyle. We have to work with them and build relationships. They want to have a double life, they want to let the adults see one thing and do everything else on the side, and you have to convince them that it's unsafe and unhealthy."

- Emphasize self-esteem. Many of these students don't have self-esteem. They think they are worthless and that there is no way out of a gang.

- Support or initiate afterschool and weekend extracurricular activities. Such activities should be competitive and require practice.

- Investigate community gang intervention programs that could benefit the school.

- Contact parents if there are signs of gang activity, such as clothing or graffiti evidenced by a student.

- Share information on gang activity with other administrators and authorities.

- Initiate community gang intervention programs

- Be aware of school areas and times that are most vulnerable for gang activity such as the cafeteria, dismissal time, changing classes, courtyards, hallways, parking lots and bathrooms.

video online
Video Transcript

Investigative Tips

School police officers can also do the following:

- Know the culture, language, names and nicknames of the students, leaders, status in the gang, who is beefing with whom and why.

- Know where they hang out inside and outside of school.

- Know how to use the Internet. Some gangs post videos on YouTube. Facebook and other social networking websites can provide valuable information. Information can also be obtained through notebook checks and locker checks.

- Know how to extract photos and videos from cell phones.

- Respect the students (be firm but fair).

- Listen to the kids.

- Give them a way out. Give them a way to contact you at all times.

- Make them know you provide safety.

- Be their dad/mom at school.

- Speak their language. Ask, "Who do you roll with?"

During interviews, officers can do the following:

- Always separate friends first.

- Ask everyone the same questions. Interview them all the same way or you can set the teen up to be hurt if the gang detects snitching.

- Do not put yourself between two or more members.

- Don't talk down to them.

- Don't try to intimidate them.

- Act like you know more about the gang than you do.

Educators, law enforcement officers and others involved with teens need to educate themselves on what teens are facing. "They need to try and understand what young people are going through and realize that they face a lot of things at home that are different from when we were all young and growing up," Rudinski says.

The conference, held in Linthicum, Md., provided tuition-free school safety training and attracted 133 attendees from across the country, including school police officers and security personnel, guidance counselors and school administrators.

"I hope they come away with the basic building blocks to secure their schools," says SSAC President Sean Burke. "Unfortunately, in today's hard economic times, school districts and police departments do not have the funding for much-needed training. School safety is not something that is taught in the police academy or in college for educators, so it is something that is our duty to provide them."

For more information on gangs in schools, contact Cpl. Mike Rudinski at mrudinski@hyattsville.org or (301) 985-1400. For information about future conferences, visit www.school-safety911.org or contact Sean Burke at sburke57@comcast.net or (978) 479-8963. For information about NIJ's school safety program, contact program manager Mike O'Shea at michael.oshea@usdoj.gov or (202) 305-7954. To view Cpl. Rudinski's presentation, visit

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qpqyljnpx3Y

TECHshorts
Technology News Summary

TECHshorts is a sampling of the technology projects, programs and initiatives being conducted by the Office of Justice Programs' National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center (NLECTC) System. If you would like additional information concerning any of the following TECHshorts, please refer to the specific point-of-contact information that is included at the end of each entry.

In addition to TECHshorts, an online, biweekly technology news summary containing articles relating to technology developments in public safety that have appeared in newspapers, newsmagazines and trade and professional journals is available through the NLECTC System's website, JUSTNET, at http://www.justnet.org. This service, the Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology News Summary, also is available through an electronic e-mail list, JUSTNETNews. Every other week, subscribers to JUSTNETNews receive the news summary directly via e-mail. To subscribe to JUSTNETNews, e-mail your request to asknlectc@justnet.org or call (800) 248-2742.

Note: The mentioning of specific manufacturers or products in TECHshorts does not constitute the endorsement of the U.S. Department of Justice, NIJ or the NLECTC System.

Countering the Threat of Jammers to Offender Tracking Programs
Corrections Technology Center of Excellence
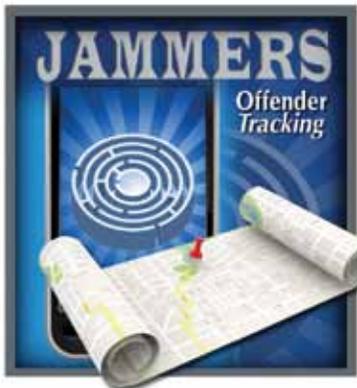
The Corrections Technology Center of Excellence has developed *Countering the Threat of Jammers to Offender Tracking Programs*, a fact sheet limited to official use and available to public-sector criminal justice agencies only.

According to the fact sheet, GPS and cell phone jammers are now readily available via the Internet at affordable prices, and can be used by offenders who do not want their locations to be tracked. Unless an agency knows how to quickly recognize that one of these devices is being used, the security of its GPS offender tracking program may be compromised. The importation, manufacture, marketing, sale and use of these devices are illegal.

The Federal Communications (FCC) is serious about enforcement and has intensified its efforts through partnerships with law enforcement agencies to crack down on those who continue to violate the law. In fact, as recently as February 2011, the FCC issued enforcement advisories to both retailers and consumers regarding the prohibition and the penalties that apply.

To receive a copy of this July 2011 fact sheet, send a request on official agency letterhead via e-mail to Sue Kaessner at sue.kaessner@correction-scoe.org. The request must reference the Jammer fact sheet and include name, title, telephone number and e-mail address.

Behind the Badge: Management Guidelines for Impacts to Body Armor
National Institute of Justice

This publication provides guidelines for procedures to follow when a law enforcement officer has sustained a blunt trauma injury underneath body armor.

An interdisciplinary review panel funded by NIJ reviewed the specifics of officers who have been shot and sustained behind armor blunt trauma (BABT). The panel identified key findings, including the need to establish routine medical care after an incident. As part of this finding, a medical subcommittee was convened that developed specific guidelines for the care of an injured officer.

Guidelines include that the vest should accompany the officer to the emergency room or trauma center because it is critical to understanding the officer's potential injuries.

The view the full document, visit www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/.../233645.pdf. For more information, contact Joe Cecconi of NIJ at joseph.cecconi@usdoj.gov.

Police Vehicle Tire Evaluation Results Released
NLECTC-National

Through a contractual effort with the Michigan State Police, NLECTC-National has released the results of a June 2011 evaluation of how numerous brands of tires performed on a variety of police vehicles. Funded by NIJ, *2011 Police Tire Evaluation* presents detailed statistical information grouped by tire brand and vehicle model. Links within the Internet-only publication lead readers directly to the specific information they need.
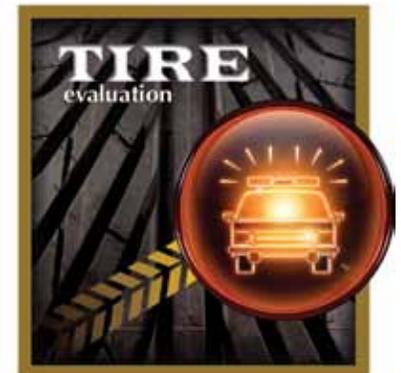
Information published in the report can be used to help law enforcement agency procurement officers make informed decisions regarding replacement tires. Tire manufacturers included in this evaluation are Goodyear, Firestone, Cooper, Nokian, Nitto and Pirelli. All tires used in this evaluation were purchased from a retail tire store to ensure each model was an actual production version.

To view 2011 Police Tire Evaluation*, visit http://www.justnet.org/Pages/RecordView. aspx?itemid=3101. For more information, contact Alex Sundstrom of NLECTC-National at rsundstrom@justnet.org.*

EASING COMMUNICATION *with*
COGNITIVE RADIO

In the wake of the season's most devastating hurricane, a major metropolitan area reaches out to nearby smaller towns for law enforcement and firefighting assistance. Communication between the city's command center and public safety professionals from these smaller areas is crucial, so the first thing those individuals providing mutual aid do when they reach the impacted area is pull out their smartphones and use an interface to search for public safety networks in range.

The scenario described above might take place much sooner than you might think. A research team from Virginia Tech has delivered a prototype device that uses an Android interface to search for nearby public safety networks, provide push-to-talk capability and create a bridge between two networks.

Charles W. Bostian, Virginia Tech alumni distinguished professor emeritus in electrical and computer engineering, says the formal goal of the Office of Justice Programs' National Institute of Justice-funded project was to solve the interoperability problem by providing intelligent and affordable all-band all-mode radios that find and identify public safety networks and configure themselves to interoperate with them.

"We use the Android as an input-output device. It's not functioning as a phone, but we use its internal computer, its speaker, its microphone and its touchscreen
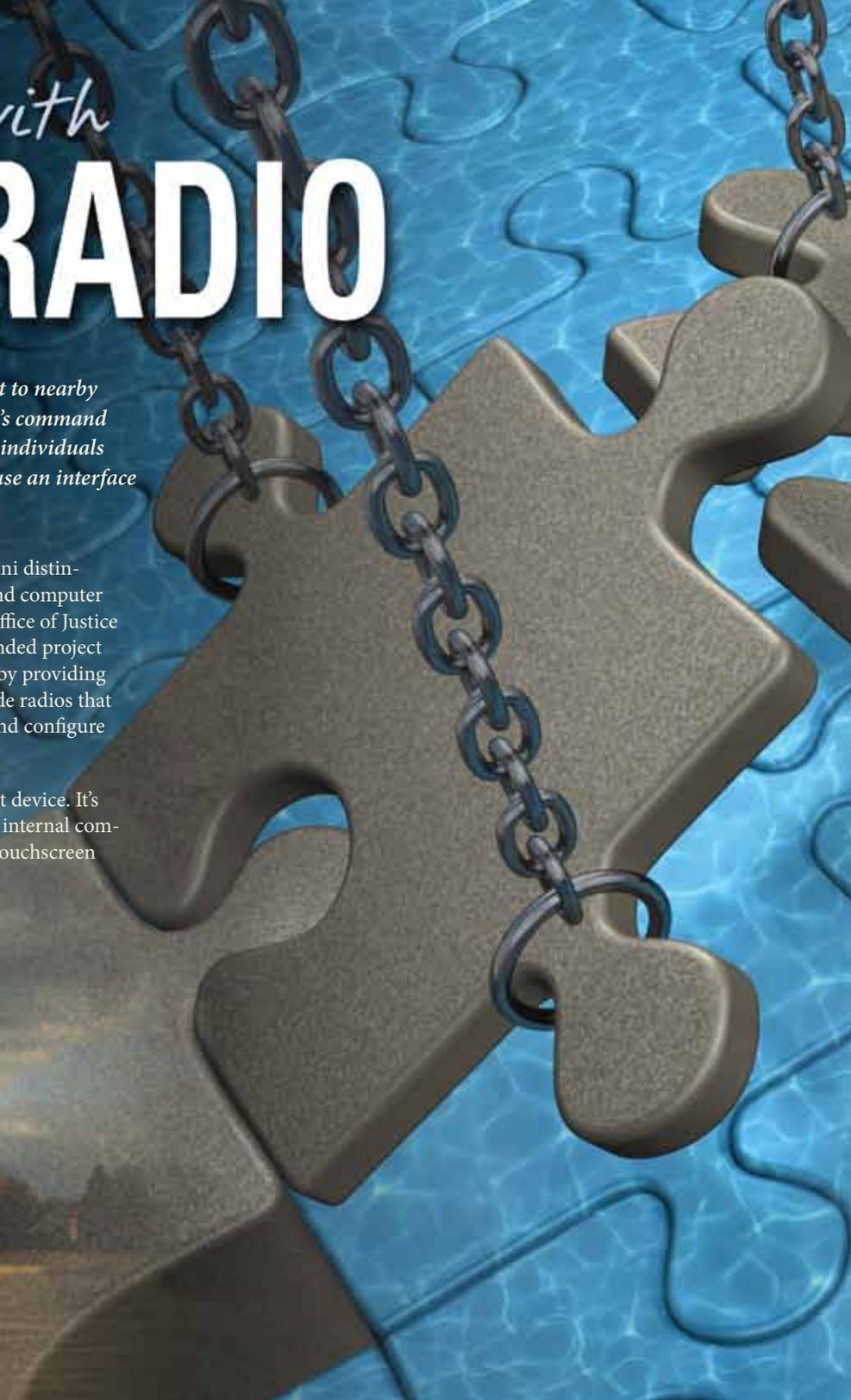
display. It's connected to another device that is our radio, but there is no reason why the connection could not be wireless and no reason the phone could not switch between being used as a smartphone and being part of the radio system," Bostian says.

The prototype radio can find signals from all public safety networks within range, then use the Android to display them to the operator and allow the operator to select one for operational use. It also can serve as a handheld gateway between any two networks or as a handheld repeater.

"Our thinking is this would be extremely useful in situations like they had in New Orleans after Katrina, or on 9/11, where a lot of the infrastructure has been destroyed," says Bostian. "Help comes pouring in and they're outside their mutual aid agreements. This will enable them to talk to each other, although there will still be command and control safeguards that the agencies will have to implement."

Because the project is software-based and uses a standard radio and computer chips, Bostian thinks a manufacturer could pick up the prototype and develop it for sale in the $1,200 range, which would be much less expensive than available radios that operate on all public safety bands. Now that the prototype has been completed and delivered, he hopes that a manufacturer will become interested in producing the device commercially. In the meantime, Bostian sees the next step as building 10 to 20 prototypes for beta testing, pending receipt of funding by his successor (Bostian plans to finalize his retirement in the near future).

In addition to advocating beta testing by members of the public safety community, Bostian drew on their expertise while developing the prototype.

"We have a large campus police department," he says. "They have an interoperability problem every time there's a football game, because they typically bring in a large number of officers from surrounding jurisdictions. There's a command center at the top of the stadium where lieutenants or captains from the three largest forces sit with their own radios and cell phones and shout across the center at each other. If they need to communicate with an officer from a small force, someone has to go tap that officer on the shoulder."

Bostian added that interoperability was also a huge issue during the tragic April 16, 2007 campus shooting incident.

The research team met with focus groups composed of the local public safety professionals to ensure that the Virginia Tech group fully understood the interoperability issues the public safety community faces on a routine basis.

"It was made clear to us from the start that if officers and firefighters didn't like what we developed, they won't use it and it will fail," Bostian says. "We talked to them about what they wanted to see, what they like and what they don't like about the tools they have now. We wanted to make sure they liked the display and were comfortable with it."

Bostian says ensuring that officers' needs were met led to the decision to use the Android, because it's an interface they already understand and like. The same technology could be applied using an iPhone for control, he says.

For more information about the "A Public Safety Cognitive Radio on a Digital Signal Processor Platform for Affordable Interoperability" project, contact Charles Bostian at bostian@vt.edu, or NIJ Communications Program Manager Joe Heaps at (202) 841-2563 or Joseph.Heaps@ usdoj.gov.

merging TECHNOLOGIES
for better policing

The Minneapolis Police Department is enjoying a steady decrease in crime rates and more efficient use of manpower thanks to a cohesive use of different technologies.

"Tough financial times are a time to invest rather than divest from technology," says Deputy Chief Robert Allen. "By effectively using technology and merging existing technology, you can make your law enforcement efforts more effective."

The department uses crime mapping and predictive analytics to identify where to concentrate police resources, and video cameras to perform tactical analytics to help assess scenes to identify the location, how many officers should respond, from which direction they should approach and what they should do when they arrive.

Minneapolis now has about 200 cameras and police are integrating mobile cameras and license plate recognition cameras to the system. The department is no longer purchasing fixed cameras, but rather purchasing mobile camera systems. Mobile cameras allow police to move them around in response to emerging crime trends and patterns. The department is also working to identify exterior cameras on buildings that the building owners are willing to share with police.

Allen says the department, which has about 850 patrol officers, will expand the use of video cameras where emerging crime patterns are apparent. A current project seeks to allow police access to businesses' interior cameras in the event of an incident alert.

"Our hope is to build the switchboard that allows us to pull in cameras from different sites. We don't want to look inside a bank or a school routinely, only unless there is an emergency and we really need to. It would be in response to a triggered alert," Allen explains.

The department has also merged ShotSpotter® gun detection technology with a video system.

"We have integrated the ShotSpotter® system with a video system so that when a shot goes off the camera automatically turns to where the shot is coming from," Allen says. In 2010 the system was instrumental in police identifying and arresting a suspect in a homicide case.

"We would have been unlikely to solve it had it not been for the camera. Shots were fired, the camera turned and got the vehicle, and based on that we were able to track down a suspect," Allen says.

Allen spoke about the department's efforts at the Office of Justice Programs' National Institute of Justice Fall 2011 Technology Institute for Law Enforcement. He emphasizes the importance of a cohesive technology approach.

"The mistake people make is the belief that stand-alone technology has to stand alone. By merging ShotSpotter and video cameras, we made them both more effective," he says.

The department has been employing predictive analytics for about a year and a half, with good results.

"We now have 70 percent of Part I crimes occur in about 6 percent of the land mass of Minneapolis, so knowing where that 6 percent will occur really helps us focus the police resources," Allen says. Part I offenses are homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny-theft, auto theft and arson.

The department has seen about a 48 percent reduction in Uniform Crime Reports Part I offenses since 1998, when the department began to strongly embrace technology such as crime mapping, and plan how best to use it. Since 2005, the city has seen declines in the crime rate every year. Part I crimes are at the lowest level since the early 1960s, according to Allen.

Before the city installed any cameras, officials sought community approval.

"We first went to the community and said we are thinking of doing this and if they won't support cameras we won't do it, and every community said we want them," Allen says. "There have been relatively few concerns. We talked to the community and it was their decision to put them in. We had 20 community meetings before putting cameras in downtown Minneapolis. We put a privacy policy in place that says the cameras are used only to enforce criminal behavior. We have a kiosk in the police station where the public can come in and look at what we are monitoring at any given time."

The inspiration for integrating cameras with the retail establishment came from the Northamptonshire Police in England eight years ago. Police there had developed a retail crime initiative that was a partnership between police and private security. Minneapolis set up a system that uses video cameras to monitor street corners, and a radio network allows private security services to communicate and share information with the police.

Minneapolis continues to collaborate with other police departments to share information, ideas and best practices.

For more information, contact Deputy Chief Robert Allen at (612) 673-2776 or Robert.allen@ minneapolismn.gov.

New Policing Era Dawns in
DUNWOODY

Is it a dream, or a nightmare?

You've just been named chief of a brand-new police force. You get to select everything: every officer hired, every policy the department will follow, every technology put into use. It's all your call; you get all the credit — and all the blame.

No wonder Chief Billy Grogan of Dunwoody, Ga., kept waking up at 2 a.m.

Dunwoody, located in DeKalb County (suburban Atlanta), incorporated as a city on Dec. 1, 2008, and hired Grogan as police chief on December 17 of that year. Given a mandate to have the police force up and running by April 1, 2009, Grogan immediately hired his senior staff, divided up responsibilities, and set out to create a department with 40-plus officers and additional support staff from scratch. One administrative staff member assumed responsibility for recruiting, another helped with background checks, a third developed policies and procedures, and two others procured equipment and set up training programs.

In addition to overseeing the entire process, Grogan brought networking into play by contacting and drawing on the experiences of chiefs in several other Georgia cities that had incorporated in recent years.

"We only had a short window to get ready," Grogan says. "The majority of officers could start only two weeks before the department went live, so we had to do orientation, Taser training, firearms training, OC training, literally all of our use-of-force training in that amount of time."

All of that hard work paid off when the department's officers were sworn in as a group on the evening of March 31, and then set out in patrol cars at midnight, lights flashing and sirens wailing, to usher in a new era of policing services in the city of 47,000. Getting those vehicles ready to go proved to be one of Dunwoody's biggest technology challenges.

"Sometimes it takes three or four months to receive vehicles after you order them," Grogan explains. "We didn't have that much time. We found a group of white Crown Vics at an auto dealer and a group of black ones at an auto wholesaler that someone else had ordered and then decided not to take. We painted each of them the other color and were ready to roll in time."

Obtaining enough ammunition proved another challenge, due to high demand not only from other law enforcement agencies, but also from the military and civilian sectors. The department's newly designed badges didn't arrive until two days before the agency "went live," causing administrators to research the possibility of inexpensive generic alternatives.

"There were just a ton of details to consider and we couldn't debate them at length; we just had to make a decision and go," Grogan says.

One technology implementation that Dunwoody opted to postpone was selecting a records management system, delaying that choice until the department had been in operation for several months. This gave the administration more time to consider the right fit and allowed officers to first become familiar with other features in their patrol cars, such as laptops, in-car video and GPS.

Funds from a low-interest loan obtained from the Georgia Municipal Association financed most capital purchases, including ballistic-resistant body armor (Dunwoody has a mandatory wear policy), handguns and backup weapons. The department recently added three portable license plate reader systems to its technology inventory.

"To some degree, purchasing the equipment was easy in that we had exigent circumstances that made us exempt from putting out an RFP, then waiting for vendor bids and going through a review process. It was still quite a challenge, but it was very rewarding," Grogan says.

Although with 46 officers Dunwoody qualifies as a small police department, the agency serves an area whose resident population nearly doubles during the work week, when approximately 100,000 individuals work in the city's business area. Add 50,000 daily visitors to Perimeter Mall and 9,000 students at Georgia Perimeter College, Dunwoody Campus, and that's plenty of people packed into a 13-square mile service area. In 2010, its first full year of operation, Dunwoody had to deal with almost 1,800 Part I crimes (mostly property crimes).

"A lesson I'd like to share with others in a similar situation is to surround yourself with good people, people that you know and can trust and rely on," Grogan says.

"Another key lesson was that all of our officers worked for other police departments, and we had to persuade them, partly with good pay and good benefits, that it was worth their while to come to Dunwoody."

He adds, "We have hired the best and the brightest officers possible to provide the highest level of service to the community we serve. Our officers have the highest standard of integrity, thousands of hours of training and numerous advanced certifications, as well as a strong desire to make Dunwoody a safer community and the police department a great place to work."

For more information, contact Chief Billy Grogan at billy.grogan@dunwoodyga.gov or (678) 382-6902. Municipalities seeking to start a police department or obtain information and assistance with issues facing an existing department should also contact the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center (NLECTC) System's Small, Rural, Tribal and Border Regional Center (less than 50 sworn officers), or States, Major Cities and Counties Regional Center (50 or more sworn officers), through the NLECTC website at http://www.justnet.org, or by calling (800) 248-2742. The NLECTC System is a program of the Office of Justice Programs' National Institute of Justice.

A New Way of Community Policing

Like many other law enforcement agencies in the United States, Dunwoody has found that social media are an important new technology tool in a police department's inventory. Chief Billy Grogan says that the community is well connected to the Internet, with many local blogs.

"We wanted to get into social media right away in a big way," Grogan explains. "The agency itself is new to Dunwoody, and most of the officers are new to Dunwoody. We wanted to have a physical presence, but we also wanted to connect online via the Web. We thought this was a great way to reach out to the community. We've been on Twitter from day one, then we moved into Facebook® and YouTube. We've really worked on our website, and we feel we've been very successful in getting information out to the community. I look at social media as a different way of community policing."

On the Dunwoody website, visitors can read Grogan's own blog, Grogan's Corner, read the agency's mission and vision statements, and learn about community outreach and events. Other features include a "police to citizen" portal, access to crime reports, information on neighborhood watch and a mechanism for submitting online crime tips.

"We're committed to engaging the community in partnerships so we can reduce crime and disorder and improve the quality of life of our citizens," Grogan says. "We practice a community policing philosophy throughout the organization. We developed our website as a source of public safety information for the community."

Visit the Dunwoody Police Department website at http://dunwoodyga.gov/Departments/Dunwoody-Police-Department.aspx.

slide show online

Launching a
RED-LIGHT
Camera Program

The use of traffic cameras to enforce red-light laws has gained popularity in recent years, as jurisdictions find they improve traffic safety. Not all states have state laws authorizing automated enforcement, and the laws in place vary. But as long as a state does not have a law prohibiting automated enforcement, jurisdictions can often find ways to establish a red-light automated enforcement program.

One city that has established a successful program is Gulf Breeze, which was the first city in Florida to implement red-light cameras.

Gulf Breeze is a waterfront community of about 5,700, with a police force of 17 fulltime sworn officers. The city sits on the tip of the Fairpoint Peninsula, across Pensacola Bay from the city of Pensacola.

Gulf Breeze's location on U.S. Route 98 on the tip of the peninsula makes it a main route for motorists driving from Pensacola across the bay bridge to the peninsula. According to Gulf Breeze Police Chief Peter Paulding, 57,000 cars pass through the city on Route 98 each day. A spike in accidents prompted the city to consider using traffic cameras.

"We had a dramatic increase in crashes in 2003, and we were already known by AAA as a top community for traffic enforcement at that time," Paulding says. "We were employing all of the traditional traffic enforcement tactics of a police agency, yet we experienced a 29 percent increase in traffic accidents that year."

To address the problem, Gulf Breeze formed a traffic safety task force comprising citizens, traffic engineers, businessmen and law enforcement agencies. One of the task force's conclusions was to employ technology.

"We began looking at red-light camera enforcement because we had done a traffic analysis of accidents, which were occurring in intersections and turning points in the roadway," Paulding says.

Police had the support of the city council, but because the state of Florida at the time did not have enabling legislation allowing traffic cameras, Gulf Breeze enacted a red-light camera enforcement ordinance that would allow it to set up cameras and issue traffic violations and impose civil fines.

"We realized we could not issue a normal traffic ticket, but we could enact an ordinance and issue the equivalent of a parking ticket — no points on the driver's license, and offenses are not reported to insurance companies, just a civil violation fine is issued to the vehicle," Paulding explains.

The first cameras were installed in one intersection in March 2006. The city had to install a stand-alone system that could not interact with the state Department of Transportation equipment in any way, and chose a camera system that detects changes in the light optically. A month later, the city had to disconnect

and shift the camera location slightly so it was not in the right-of-way on state property. The cameras went live again in August 2006, and stayed in operation until August 2009, when the equipment malfunctioned and the vendor subsequently made a business decision to cease operations in the United States. Gulf Breeze found another vendor and got a replacement contract and equipment in place and went operational again in March 2011.

"We know that over 90 percent of all the crashes that occur in our city occur on Highway 98 where the cameras are installed," Paulding says. "We've employed a number of strategies to reduce crashes and cameras are one of those, but our data shows a correlation between when the cameras are operating with a reduction in the number of accidents."

The department's data shows a 23 percent decrease in crashes between 2006 and 2008 in Gulf Breeze. Crashes began to increase when the cameras were removed, then stabilized when they became operational again in 2011. Other traffic enforcement strategies have also contributed to the reduction in crashes.

Another advantage to the cameras is they improve officer safety, as well as traffic enforcement, Paulding says.

"Any time you can reduce the number of times officers have to be in traffic, but still enforce the law is a good thing. It's not as dangerous for an officer as when a motorist is pulled over," he says.

The Florida legislature passed legislation in 2010 authorizing installation of red-light cameras by cities and counties in the state. When Gulf Breeze initially implemented the camera system, the fine was $100 for a red-light violation, which the city split with the vendor. When the state passed legislation, the fine increased to $158. The state takes $83 of every violation, leaving $75 for the city and vendor to split, according to Paulding. If the initial violation notice goes unpaid, it becomes a uniform traffic citation and a violation of state law, and the fine increases to $264.

Police validate every violation before it is sent out. Gulf Breeze does not enforce right-turn-on-red violations because the city has a

small pedestrian population using the roadway. Motorists caught by the cameras receive a copy of a still photo marking the violation. The notice also includes a Web link and a password so the car owner can view a video of the violation.

"It's possible to do the project even if you don't have state enabling legislation in the state," Paulding says. "We did it in such a way where we were able to employ the red-light camera technology without violating state law. We provided for violator due process appeals. We think it would withstand legal challenges pretty much anywhere."

If no state enabling legislation is in place, as long as no state legislation exists prohibiting the cameras, jurisdictions wanting to set up a camera program should establish a need for automated enforcement based on the seriousness of crashes or the volume of crashes at a particular location.

"Once that's done, you need the community to support it, because there is pushback to it and critics of it, who may not live in the

district," Paulding says. "Local folks here did not object. So if you can justify it and then get the city council in your jurisdiction to support the effort, then create a bylaw or local ordinance like you would for abandoned buildings or obstructing sidewalks. Then you can put it out to bid and deal with vendors."

Gulf Breeze has advised jurisdictions in Florida and in other states such Ohio, Colorado and Arkansas on setting up a red-light camera program.

As of November 2011, in the United States, red-light cameras were being used in about 550 communities, and speed cameras were being used in more than 104 jurisdictions, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS). An IIHS study released in early 2011 found that camera enforcement in 14 large cities reduced the rate of fatal red-light running crashes by 24 percent (http://www.iihs.org/news/rss/pr020111.html).

For more information, contact Chief Peter Paulding at paulding@bellsouth.net.

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