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GOOD STORY

South Dakota Highway Patrol and Minnehaha County Reserve Law Enforcement Officers Major Sobriety Checkpoints

SUMMARY

The South Dakota Highway Patrol (SDHP) employs volunteer reserve police officers from the Minnehaha County Office of Emergency Management's (OEM) Reserve Law Enforcement Unit (MCRLEU) to supplement full-time officers at sobriety checkpoints in and around Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

BACKGROUND

Combating drunk driving is a high priority in the Sioux Falls area. The SDHP has collaborated with the Governor's Office, the State Office of Public Safety, and local law enforcement agencies to increase efforts to combat drunk driving in South Dakota. Their efforts include public education campaigns, increased patrols targeting drunk drivers, annual sobriety checkpoints, and a media campaign targeting drunk driving.

Major sobriety checkpoints are set up on Interstate 29, Interstate 90, Interstate 229, and other roads during holidays and other special events. Conducting sobriety checkpoints requires apprehending impaired drivers as well as a series of operational tasks, including traffic management, site safety and security, initial interviews of drivers arriving at the checkpoint, and conducting an inventory of the contents of impounded vehicles. The safe and effective operation of major checkpoints requires approximately 50 officers and 12 emergency medical technicians (EMTs). Prior to 2003, checkpoints were staffed by officers from the SDHP, the Minnehaha County Sheriff's Office (MCSO), and the Sioux Falls Police Department (SFPD), who worked overtime or were reassigned from regular duties. The cost of overtime and extensive manpower resources placed significant strain on participating departments, limiting the number of major checkpoints to one a year.

Minnehaha County OEM Director Lynn DeYoung approached Sergeant Alan Welsh of the Sioux Falls district of the SDHP in June 2003 to ask if OEM's reserve officers could support upcoming SDHP operations. Director DeYoung proposed using the reserve officer unit during checkpoints to conduct operational tasks that do not require formal arrests and charges. Sgt. Welsh welcomed the opportunity and agreed to have OEM's reserve officers participate in large-scale sobriety checkpoints.

GOALS

The Minnehaha Reserve Law Enforcement Unit supplements SDHP, MCSO and SFPD full-time officers during major sobriety checkpoints. This reduces the strain on SDHP, MCSO and SFPD resources and increases the frequency of the checkpoints.

DESCRIPTION

The SDHP and MCRLEU sobriety checkpoint initiative relies on the reserve officers' training and organization. Minnehaha reserve officers' mobilization procedure and their high level of training have enabled the SDHP, MCSO, SFPD and the reserve officers to work together effectively at sobriety checkpoints. The SDHP schedules major checkpoints prior to holidays or drunken driving awareness campaigns. In 2005, three major checkpoints occurred during the week of Halloween. The increased frequency of these checkpoints illustrates the success of the initiative.

Minnehaha Reserve Officers Law Enforcement Unit

The Minnehaha County OEM's Reserve Law Enforcement Unit provides volunteer officers to police departments in the Sioux Falls area. Assistant Director of Emergency Management Doug Blomker coordinates volunteer activities with the SDHP, the MCSO, and the SFPD to manage volunteer assignments.

The Minnehaha OEM has a well-organized and highly trained Reserve Law Enforcement Officer Unit. The unit was established in the 1970s and is now incorporated into the Volunteers in Police Service Program of Citizen Corps. The unit consists of approximately 50 volunteer officers who supplement and support career officers from the MCSO, SFPD, Brandon Police Department, SDHP, and the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks. Reserve officers receive an intensive five-month training program designed to be a condensed version of a regular police academy. The program is comprised of approximately 150 hours of training with courses in criminal law, arrest, search and seizure, driving under-the-influence detection and apprehension, traffic direction and enforcement, and first aid. Courses are taught by law enforcement officers from surrounding jurisdictions.

Upon completion of the program, each reserve officer is certified by the South Dakota Law Enforcement Standards and Training Commission as a reserve law enforcement officer. State regulations require reserve officers to complete no less than eight hours of duty time and three hours of training each month. Volunteers complete this requirement by working a shift with a full-time officer from one of the law enforcement agencies, providing security during parades or special events, or through participation in a sobriety checkpoint.

Mobilizing Reserve Officers to Sobriety Checkpoints

In order for volunteers to provide support to police departments, state regulations require a specific protocol be followed. Reserve officers are not allowed to self-deploy; their services must be formally requested from a law enforcement agency in advance. To ensure state regulations are adhered to, Assistant Director Blomker and Sgt. Welsh established the following protocol for sobriety checkpoints:

- **Request for reserve officers:** Reserve officer participation requires an official request from the SDHP in advance of the checkpoint. Sgt. Welsh contacts the Minnehaha County OEM assistant director 30 to 60 days prior to the scheduled checkpoints and requests a specific number of officers.
- **Availability:** The OEM assistant director sends an email to reserve officers to request volunteers. The OEM assistant director works with the captain, lieutenants, and duty sergeants to compile a list of available reserve officers and sends it to the SDHP.
- **Deployment:** Reserve officers meet at the OEM headquarters before the operation to complete preparations and deploy to the checkpoint as a team.
- **Assignment:** Upon arrival, the reserve officers meet with the SDHP sergeant who briefs them on assignments, responsibilities, schedule changes, and safety and security procedures.

Operational Responsibilities

During checkpoint operations, OEM's reserve officers have primary responsibility for a range of operational support tasks, including:

- **Traffic management:** Reserve officers set up and operate all traffic control points. During operations, a reserve officer is stationed at the start of a traffic lane and is responsible for conducting initial interviews with each driver. Reserve officers manage the movement of vehicles after the checkpoint lanes.
- **Administering Sobriety Tests:** Reserve officers pre-screen the drivers and, if reserve officers suspect a driver is intoxicated, they turn him or her over to full-time officers for further investigation.
- **Site Security:** Several reserve officers maintain watch over the checkpoint area to ensure the safety and security of the staff and prisoners. Reserve officers also guard the technicians conducting blood alcohol tests to ensure their safety.
- **Impounded Vehicle Inventories:** Reserve officers complete an inventory of the contents of an impounded vehicle before it is removed from the checkpoint area. To ensure the contents of the impounded vehicle are accurately recorded, an additional reserve officer or the arresting officer witnesses the inventory.
- **Logistical Support:** Reserve officers handle various logistical matters during checkpoints including making transportation arrangements for passengers of arrested drivers, providing tents during adverse weather, arranging for checkpoint supplies, and transporting passengers when needed.

Resource Requirements

Of the 50 officers deployed to checkpoints, approximately 15 to 20 are full-time officers from SDHP, MCSO, and SFPD, and 25 to 30 are members of the reserve officer unit. The reserve officer unit provides additional resources without additional cost, reducing the number of full-time officers needed. These extra resources lower the cost of the sobriety checkpoints.

The Minnehaha County Emergency Management Rescue Squad provides rescue trucks equipped with lights to illuminate the checkpoints. The squad is staffed with EMTs and is available for onsite emergency medical assistance if necessary.

Growth in Program

Prior to reserve officer involvement, significant costs limited the number of major checkpoints to one per year. Since the initiative began in the summer of 2003, SDHP has conducted, on average, three to four major checkpoints each year. Three were held in 2005. Reserve officers have participated in all of the large-scale sobriety check points around Sioux Falls since the program began.

REQUIREMENTS

Keys to Success

Training. Minnehaha reserve officers receive extensive training conducted by full-time, sworn officers and members of the law enforcement community. This training ensures reserve officers possess the skills necessary to provide support and organizational assistance to full-time officers during checkpoints. The participation of full-time officers in volunteer training results in mutual trust between the groups.

Organization. The Minnehaha OEM assistant director coordinates all volunteer activities and maintains a listserv of available officers. This allows the reserve unit to be easily mobilized when needed for sobriety checkpoints.

Professionalism. The reserve officers conduct themselves professionally when performing their operational tasks. This professionalism helps maintain a high level of integrity during the checkpoints and adds to the confidence full-time officers have in the reserve unit.

Resources

No additional resources are needed to use the reserve officers for checkpoint duty. The Reserve Law Enforcement Unit receives funding from Minnehaha County, Sioux Falls City, and grants from local businesses. This funding covers the cost of reserve officer training. The Minnehaha OEM provides the officers with the equipment the unit brings to the checkpoint.

Links

Minnehaha County (SD) Office of Emergency Management

http://www.minnehahacounty.org/depts/emergency_manage/emergency_manage.asp

Minnehaha County (SD) Sheriff's Office

<http://www.minnehahacounty.org/depts/sheriff/sheriff.asp>

South Dakota Highway Patrol

<http://hp.state.sd.us/>

Sioux Falls (SD) Police Department

<http://www.siouxfalls.org/police.aspx>

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Welsh, Alan. Sergeant, South Dakota Highway Patrol. Interview with *Lessons Learned Information Sharing*, 6 Jan 2006.

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