

SUBMISSION FOR HERMAN GOLDSTEIN  
PROBLEM ORIENTED POLICING AWARD

**OPERATION SAFE STREETS**

SUMMARY

The city of White Plains, NY has a resident population of 54,000 and a daytime population of 280,000 persons. It is a corporate and government center in the New York Metropolitan region and boasts two of the largest shopping malls in the area as well as Federal, State and City courthouses and offices on the same municipal plaza. It is an important part of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority System in the form of one of its busiest railroad plazas and its booming commercial and residential development and expansion has made White Plains one of the fastest growing cities in the New York area. Additionally, its sophisticated ambience lends it to host numerous cultural and political events on local, state and national levels. The former President and First Lady reside in close proximity and often use White Plains as a media forum.

Three distinctly different issues presented to the Department and required immediate attention. Addressing each one individually would have required prioritizing them and establishing a timetable for incremental resolution. The Department's response was to create Operation Safe Streets, which viewed these problems as related and created solutions that were multi-dimensional. Its primary strategy was inter-agency cooperation, education and enforcement. Both Police and Fire Bureaus, operating within the Department of Public Safety, jointly utilized resources to create a uniform services omnipresence. Public education was achieved through electronic and print media as well as numerous meetings with citizen and business groups and most importantly, enforcement strategies were preceded by or in coordination with extensive educational efforts to achieve public support before implementation. The emergent issues can be divided as follows:

1. The elevation of the national security alert level as determined first by the Dept. of Homeland Security, New York State and then the City of New York impacted the response posture of White Plains. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Westchester County is a prime target outside of NYC. White Plains, the center of the county, represents a significant terrorist threat because of its proximity to NYC as well as its significant growth, development and central role in federal, state and local government.
2. The second element involves the unique commuter nature of the city, its geography and street design. Economic and government areas are centrally located in the epicenter of the city, which means that most of the important traffic arteries that feed this area pass through long-standing residential areas. Citizen complaints, accident analysis and staff

observations indicate the need for enhanced enforcement of vehicle and traffic laws, especially as they relate to speeding.

3. The City has experienced a significant increase in its nightlife almost exclusively centered in a three square block area. This caused an enormous influx of people all year long, which required a significant deployment of manpower. Other areas of the City saw quality of life issues and other violations emerge as more pressing priorities drew Department resources. The rapidity and size of this nightlife growth strained traditional policing responses.

To respond to these emerging issues in a comprehensive and coordinated manner, the Department created Operation Safe Streets. One component, Operation Blue Shield, deployed highly visible Special Response Team units, established vehicle checkpoints, assigned patrol officers to visit critical locations and presented a series of terrorism awareness briefings for business and residential communities. Traffic enforcement included intensive, multi-divisional, twenty-four hour a day vehicle and traffic enforcement combined with a broad based educational component. We also developed Operation Minuteman, which rapidly moves a cadre of units, Traffic, Patrol, Plainclothes, Mounted and others to address quality of life violations in the "nightlife area" as well as other city neighborhoods.

## **DESCRIPTION**

### **SCANNING**

The NYPD response to the elevated terror alert presented a daunting show of force and preparedness to dissuade planned activity. The hardening of NYC targets presented White Plains with the dilemma of becoming a preferred secondary target. Its environment of commerce and government, established standing as a model city and status as a significant cultural and education center in the metropolitan area create a target rich scenario.

Traffic safety is a continual concern for residents and visitors to White Plains, particularly speeding on main roads and in residential neighborhoods. Residents frequently voice their concern through their elected representatives, at neighborhood association meetings, by calling the police department, and writing letters to the editor of major metropolitan newspapers. The future effects on traffic safety and congestion from numerous commercial and residential construction projects and their ultimate occupancy are a hotly debated topic.

The midnight shift noted a significant increase in activity in and around the cities burgeoning bar and restaurant district. Daytime business owners increasingly found

vandalism, urine, and litter when opening up in the morning and complaints from adjacent residential neighborhoods increased. Redeployment of personnel to high priority areas had resulted in less attention to recognized at-risk neighborhoods thereby creating a vulnerability to street disorder.

## ANALYSIS

In order to develop an appropriate response, the Department interviewed security personnel at various corporate, retail and critical infrastructure and developed a prioritized and customized list of counter-terrorism needs. To have the capability of real-time information and response, the Department assigned a detective to the FBI Terrorism Task Force, designated a Department Intelligence Officer and created the position of a Confidential Intelligence Specialist/Attorney to review and research best legal practices. Information obtained from these sources was added to the law enforcement sensitive bulletins produced daily and analyzed by Department senior staff. Internal responsibilities and assignments were modified to increase Department flexibility.

The City's Traffic Department prepared an analysis of accidents by intersection, which resulted in a ranking of problem areas. Radar officers conducted speed surveys of critical areas to determine the extent of vehicle and traffic problem, specifically speeding and identify patterns of time and location. Prior to Operation Safe Streets, the Department responded quickly to the concerns of residents but usually only to individual complaints or neighborhoods. The Police Department came to realize that a citywide approach on all shifts, by all uniformed members was needed to create the feeling of omnipresence amongst motorists and to have an effective deterrent effect.

The schedules of senior staff members were amended so that an analysis could be conducted of late night activity, which included numerous interviews with store -owners, neighborhood residents and community leaders. It became apparent that illegal activity had cropped up in the midst of legitimate neighborhood activity. Additionally, the highly active tavern area was experiencing complaints caused by the movement of patrons and vehicular traffic between locations. As an older city, residential neighborhoods border the downtown nightlife area, which exacerbated the complaints. The Department used its Police and Fire Computer Operated Management System (PAFCOMS) to track conditions related to bar activity. Empirical data and anecdotal experience both indicated the emergence of quality of life issues in selected areas of the city.

## RESPONSE

The Department determined that it needed a city - wide, 24 hour a day response that included a multi-pronged attack combining enforcement, education, and rapid asset deployment. A comprehensive strategy was devised that would have the multiple

benefits of enhancing emergency preparedness, reducing speeding and other unsafe driving habits, reducing crime and improving quality of life in the city. This project was termed Operation Safe Streets.

The Department has made a long-term commitment to the following measures:

#### Emergency Preparedness

- During times of increased terrorism alert, members of all divisions conducted Domestic Preparedness Directed Patrols at 70 pre-determined locations.
- During Orange Alert two-member teams of fully equipped Special Response Team members were put on patrol to assist with critical Domestic Preparedness Directed Patrols and special events and gatherings.
- Increased commercial vehicle checkpoints staffed by officers specially trained in hazardous materials identification and equipped with specialized equipment, such as radiation detectors.
- Creation of a Police and Fire retired members database that collects not only information on those retirees who are willing to volunteer during an emergency, but their special skills as well.

#### Speeding and Unsafe Driving

- Deploy radar trained and equipped officers. Previously these officers only worked out of the Traffic Division, but under Operation Safe Streets other officers from the Patrol and Special Operations Divisions were trained. Presently 57% of the uniformed divisions are radar trained and speed enforcement is done 24 hours a day seven days a week.
- Cameras were mounted in certain enforcement cars to enhance prosecution, officer safety, and professionalism.
- Deployment of marked vehicles without light bars to assist in speed enforcement without compromising police visibility and the public's confidence in the person pulling them over.
- Educational traffic safety cards are issued when officers issue summonses or warnings. These cards are printed in English and Spanish. The cards are a statement of the department's commitment to traffic safety and explain the reason for the increased enforcement.
- Electronic speed signs and trailers are placed in strategic locations and moved about based on traffic volume and complaints. These devices educate motorists regarding the speed at which they are operating their vehicle.
- Defensive driving courses offered at the White Plains High School by police officers trained by AAA. This is a full day course devoted to creating safer student drivers and thereby reducing the incidence of tragic student involved accidents.
- Checkpoints conducted on all shifts for DWI, unsafe cell phone use, seatbelt, and other violations. Locations are selected by traffic volume and accident analysis.

Some are picked to coincide with areas that have other quality of life issues so as to increase police presence while enforcing traffic laws.

- Impounding of unsafe vehicles.
- Regular media releases to increase public awareness. Frequent public information dissemination through local and regional media, as well as meetings with citizen groups and affected business leaders engendered an appropriate environment for successful enforcement strategies.

### **Nightlife, Crime Reduction and Quality of Life**

- Close cooperation with Fire Department to conduct public assembly checks, inspections and to develop emergency evacuation plans. Working in conjunction with local tavern owners association, both Departments conducted training regarding life safety and underage drinking prevention.
- Supervisors were trained to utilize flexible staffing to meet changing conditions whether spontaneous or planned. These are essentially supplements to directed patrols, known as "Minuteman Deployments", where a street supervisor or duty captain can quickly deploy a large group of officers from all divisions and expertise; i.e. foot, bicycle, motorcycle, mounted, vehicle, plainclothes, etc. to meet changing needs on a real-time basis.
- Specific units within the Department, such as the Narcotics Unit, have changed focus from long term investigations to street sales and disorder.
- Schedule of joint visitations by Police and Fire to establishments that constitute a public nuisance.

### **ASSESSMENT**

The integrated use of vehicle checkpoints for road safety and terrorism protection as well as frequent varied directed patrols by the Special Response Team and other units further increased the observation that the Department utilized its assets to its fullest capacity. At risk groups, such as religious houses of worship, retail establishments and important New York region infrastructure facilities expressed their confidence in the Department's ability to provide adequate protection. This reduced the level of fear engendered by the national perception of vulnerability and according to local and regional media reports improved the overall quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

The use of random, multiple, 'Pop Up' style vehicle checkpoints has created a perception and buzz throughout the community that the police are everywhere. The amount of summons' issued has increased by 33 % relative to the same period last year. More importantly, even though approximately 23% of all tickets are issued to city residents, the senior staff receives nothing but effusive praise for the program while attending various meetings with neighborhood residents and other constituency groups. Even persons in the

audience who are in receipt of a summons admit that it is a worthwhile price to pay for increased road safety. Additionally, both residents and government officials derive an increased comfort level in the responsiveness of the Department

Arrests for quality of life violations has increased 50% over the same time period last year and the Department has established its position that street disorder will not be tolerated. Complaints from residential properties that border the tavern area have decreased due to the presence of officers from several commands working in unison and visitations by the Police and Fire Departments have reinforced the message to business owners and residents about the Department's commitment to this phase. A coordinated enforcement and prosecution strategy by both Departments has resulted in significant fines and planned closures.

## CONCLUSION

Operation Safe Streets represents a coordinated approach utilizing multiple resources to resolve divergent problems with solutions of surprising commonality. A unified initiative of inter-agency cooperation, public education and enforcement has produced a program the efficacy of which has surprised even our most optimistic proponents.