



Project Summary

Our successful Volunteers In Police Service program was the basis of a marine **Coastwatch** response to the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill catastrophe that threatened our community in 2010. Based upon the success of using volunteers to drive our marked patrol cars for years, we expanded the duties to marine patrol. VIPS are trained to operate our boat and are an early warning team to detect oil sheen and globs in the water before it strikes our shore. They also helped prevent the theft of floating boom that was been placed to protect the sensitive environmental areas of the city.

Our experience partnering with the community to reduce crime is extraordinary. Volunteers have driven marked Gulf Breeze Police vehicles on a daily basis for 5 years to calm traffic, assist motorists and reduce crime. These volunteers have reduced crashes, assisted motorists and directly aided the patrol force as well. Since 2005, citizen volunteers have driven marked Gulf Breeze police vehicles primarily on Highway 98, where the majority of our crashes occur. Their efforts contributed to a **17.31% reduction** in crashes in the past six years.

The success of our VIPS program spawned our Coastwatch program. It helped prevent the theft or vandalism of the boom has been placed in environmentally sensitive areas of the city. Shortly after the first boom placements, 1800 feet of the boom was reported missing. The boom costs \$20 per foot and the supply had been exhausted nationally as 3.5 million feet had been purchased for deployment across the Gulf of Mexico coastline. It was an attractive target and the loss of the boom alarmed our citizenry. We recruited a cadre of 32 volunteers who were experienced boaters and could demonstrate proficiency with boat operations. They were trained in police radio protocol, patrol techniques, and water and hazardous material safety. Coastwatchers operated the Police boat in pairs for safety, were highly visible, in direct communication with our police dispatch, and had GPS. Our Coastwatch checked the boom 3 times a day 7 days a week. They protected the boom, searched for oil approaching the city, and responded to calls of oiled wildlife to confirm reports. By obtaining accurate GPS coordinates, they expedited response and prevented oil from striking our coastline and environmentally sensitive areas. They were able to report boom damage quickly and prevented any further thefts of boom protected our city.

2011 Submission

Project Description

Coastwatch Program: Problem-Oriented Policing Response to the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Disaster



Gulf Breeze Police Department

"Striving for Excellence in Policing"

Community Background

The City of Gulf Breeze is a waterfront community located in Santa Rosa County in the northwest part of the Florida panhandle within 30 miles of the Alabama border. We have a population of 6,189 that prides itself on its fine small town character, quality education, excellent local government and multitudes of waterfront activities. While primarily a residential community adjacent to the City of Pensacola, average daily traffic counts through our City exceed 50,000 during the off season, increasing to 150,000 for special events on Pensacola Beach. As a result of such spikes in required services, it was necessary for GBPD to supplement its forces with volunteers. We are a proactive and award winning community-policing agency that is accredited by the Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation. Our workforce consists of 17 full time sworn officers, 5 paid part time officers and 3 volunteer auxiliary officers. Our civilian staff has 8 full time and 4 part time paid positions and 45 Volunteers in Police Service who volunteer daily to help our traffic control. We recruited an additional force of 32 volunteer Coastwatchers to improve our response to the BP Deepwater Horizon oil disaster. Coastwatchers operated our police boat and served as early warning of approaching oil, checked our protective boom at sensitive areas and responded to oiled wildlife calls to provide GPS coordinates for accurate and quick response.

Scanning

Our successful experience with our Volunteers In Police Service program formed the basis of a marine Coastwatch response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill catastrophe that threatened our community. Based upon the success of using volunteers to drive our marked patrol cars, we expanded the duties to marine patrol. VIPS were trained to operate our boat and were an early warning team to detect oil sheen and globs in the water before it struck our shore. They also helped prevent the theft of floating boom that had been placed to protect the sensitive environmental areas of the city. They were the first response to oiled wildlife to validate the report and accurately map the location with GPS to facilitate trained responders.

Our experience partnering with the community to reduce crime is extraordinary. Volunteers have driven marked Gulf Breeze Police vehicles on a daily basis since the beginning of 2005 to calm traffic, assist motorists and reduce crime. The efforts of the volunteers have reduced crashes, assisted motorists and directly aided the patrol force as well. Since 2005, citizen volunteers have driven marked Gulf Breeze police vehicles primarily on Highway 98, where the majority of our crashes occur. Their efforts contributed to a 17.31% reduction in crashes in the past five years. They have also rendered aid to almost 350 motorists.

The success of our VIPS program spawned our Coastwatch program. It helped prevent the theft or vandalism of the boom that had been placed in environmentally sensitive areas of the city. Shortly after the first boom placements, 1800 feet of the boom was reported missing. The boom costs \$20 per foot and the supply had been exhausted nationally as 3.5 million feet had been purchased for deployment across the Gulf of

Mexico coastline. It was an attractive target and the loss of the boom alarmed our citizenry as their coastline and coastal property was exposed to oil pollution. Coastwatchers operated the Police boat, were highly visible, in direct communication with our police dispatch and had GPS. Our Coastwatch checked the boom 3 times a day 7 days a week.

Analysis

The BP Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico made national news and spewed millions of gallons of oil into the Gulf from late April until August 2010. The oil spread rapidly and extensively and was threatening our coastal community in Florida by mid-May. The oil struck Pensacola Beach on June 5, 2010. Our community is a peninsula located one mile from Pensacola Beach and is surrounded by the water and environmentally sensitive areas in the path of the plume. Our citizens, business owners, city fathers and other peer leaders expressed great concern about the potential consequences of this disaster and the likelihood of extensive damage to our coastline and to our environment. Booms were placed to protect the sensitive areas and almost immediately were reported lost, stolen, damaged or missing. It was a very expensive and difficult-to-obtain commodity since the national supply was exhausted as over 3.5 million feet had been acquired in the first month of the event. The secondary problem expressed was the lack of confidence that BP would be able to prevent oil from fouling our pristine coastline. The police department began to receive calls of vandalism and loss of the protective booms when the first 5000 feet was deployed. An additional 5000 feet was deployed and much more was in reserve. Our city developed a response by acquiring boats and a skimmer to clean up oil that may threaten our shores. The response boats and skimmer were staffed by our HazMat trained fire department to be able to be on scene very quickly. The police department had a marine patrol that was mothballed due to budgetary cuts. However the equipment was still in inventory.



Example of boom deployed to protect environmentally sensitive area of Gulf Breeze shoreline.

To avoid recruiting and coordinating many civilian boats, also the possibility of contaminating them with oil, we decided to use the police boat, boat lift and the communications equipment to patrol for boom security and potential oil sheen or tar balls or oil globs. Our Coastwatchers also responded directly to reports of oiled wildlife and obtained a precise GPS location to improve response from trained recovery workers. We reached out to residents of the community and to our

volunteers in the police department seeking boat operators who could staff the boat and provide an early warning of oil contamination before it struck shore. The boat checked our protective booms several times a day to assure their security and proper placement. Within less than a week of being charged to fill this need, we were able to put together a cadre of over 30 volunteers. They were qualified boat operators, trained in police and fire radio communications, hazardous material avoidance and safe boating techniques. In addition we established a cadre of residents living all along our coast and they were able to observe much of the booms and look for oil from shore. They were also an early warning and daily assistance resource that complimented the boat patrols.

When tasked with improving the city disaster response to BP Deepwater Horizon oil disaster, we were not sure what type of response could be made by a police department for this environmental catastrophe. By using our existing Volunteers In Police Service program as a model, we quickly realized we could offer many effective aides to the city. Our initial response was to recruit and train a cadre of volunteers to serve as an early warning on the water for the city and BP waterborne response to oil approaching the coast. That phase of the response came together in about a week by using our existing volunteers and by reaching out through our community policing sources to the waterfront property owners.

After establishing our workforce, we developed our goals. They were to protect our protective booms by checking them daily, to search for oil in the water before it impacts land, and to respond to oiled wildlife calls to obtain accurate GPS coordinates to expedite response.

As the oil approached our coastline, additional boom placements were made which closed off water navigation to many households on the water. Before the booms were placed, our patrol officers went door to door to notify the property owners to act immediately to secure their boats from their lifts. This prevented widespread concerns from homeowners who may not have been able to act in a timely fashion and their boats may have been unsecured during our hurricane season.

The community policing model we employ enabled us to develop a force of 32 citizen volunteers with short notice to assist us to respond to the BP Deepwater Horizon oil disaster. Our contacts with the community mobilized waterfront homeowners and boat operators to serve as early warning of approaching oil, maintain integrity of our protective booms and serve to provide precise GPS coordinates for oiled wildlife response.

Response

The explosion and sinking of the BP Deepwater Horizon well drilling rig in April 2010 and subsequent oil spill was the foremost concern in our city. We are a peninsula and our waterfront along three sides of the community is at risk. Our Coastwatch was an outgrowth of our VIPS program where we use volunteers to operate police cars for

traffic calming and motorist assistance. Since it has been so successful, we applied the same model to the oil disaster and staffed the police boat to patrol 7 days a week, 3 shifts per day. Shortly after the first protective boom placements were made along our coastline, 1800 feet of the boom was reported missing. The boom costs \$20 per foot and the supply was exhausted nationally as 3.5 million feet had been purchased for deployment across the Gulf of Mexico coastline. It was an attractive target and the loss of the boom alarmed our citizenry. In addition to the boom protection, when oil was spotted the Coastwatch marked it on GPS. They called the location in to our dispatch center on police radio and the information was forwarded to cleanup crews and Unified Command. The Coastwatch remained on site to facilitate the quick and easy location of the oil by the cleanup response.

Recent budget cuts had reduced the sworn patrol force of the police department and the police boat was sidelined due to the same budget restrictions. By using volunteers, we were able to employ our marine resources (boat, trailer, dock, communications) and



Coastwatchers assembled in front of police boat at Shoreline Park boat launch in Gulf Breeze.

respond to the oil disaster. The use of the police boat facilitated communication, was highly visible to the community and provided a sense of security and demonstrated the proactive response of our city to the event. Volunteers called our dispatch center on the police or fire radio from the boat and the dispatch center was able to report oil immediately to a city cleanup crew as well as to the Unified Command Center for immediate response. Such a plan

provided an early warning last line of defense for our coastline, facilitating the cleanup in the water before it struck our coast. We received response from 32 citizens and conducted training in communication, boat operation, safe hazardous material response and scheduling. We staffed the boat 7 days a week, 3 shifts per day. The morning and evening shift focused on our infrastructure protection (checking boom placement and integrity) and then on oil detection. Each shift was staffed by a trained boat operator and accompanied by an observer. Two volunteers were scheduled aboard each shift for safety. The volunteers also rendered aid to boaters as possible and called in any hazards or situations that required response for oil cleanup, wildlife protection or other marine hazard.

Volunteers were solicited through the local media, through our existing community policing contacts, and from our existing volunteer pool. We received input from waterfront homeowners, boat operators, from BP personnel, city management and our elected officials. The project came together very quickly as the oil disaster spread and threatened our community. The role of the Coastwatch was expanded to include the following goals:

1. Monitor our protective boom for security and integrity.
2. Search for oil in the water before it makes landfall and impacts our coastline.

3. Respond to oiled wildlife calls to verify and to mark locations with GPS for quicker and more accurate response.

We first developed selection criteria for the volunteers. Those participating must have no adverse criminal history, a safe boater operators license or equivalent and no adverse health issues. The next training component included police patrol procedures and police radio communication and emergency equipment operation procedures. The most important part of the training was the clear identification of the goals of the program and the purpose of their efforts. They were also explicitly told that they had no enforcement function and this was underscored by policy and state law. Volunteers were provided a distinctive uniform that clearly identified that they were not law enforcement officers, yet make them highly visible for the environment in which they worked. The participation by the community was notable as we had more volunteers than paid staff; the assistance the VIPS provided our community was vital and highly visible.

As the success of the Coastwatch became apparent, a volunteer was selected to do the record keeping required to keep track of hours, duties, and assist in creating the schedule. Another volunteer was selected to assist with training newly selected replacement volunteers. The manpower demands of our sworn staff have been further reduced by these efforts. The volunteers that performed the Coastwatch used the police department resources (headquarters location, desk, phone, file cabinet).

The results since the inception of our Volunteers in Police Service Coastwatch Program far exceeded our expectations. We were able to staff our marine patrol 7 days a week, three shifts a day. The Coastwatchers patrolled at daybreak, midday and evening to maximize our ability to locate and intercept oil. VIPS became part of the fabric of our community work force and accessed police department headquarters daily. They were also issued ID credentials and were able to enter the secure areas of the department in order to perform their duties.

We developed a comprehensive training curriculum and a Field Training program for the police radio and vehicle operations for the Coastwatch. Police and fire radio use was also a part of the training and volunteers used a designated administrative radio channel unless an emergency situation required they summon police assistance immediately. Our dispatch center dispatches for both police and fire and can communicate on either radio. Volunteers were also familiarized with the operation of the emergency equipment in our boat so they knew how to properly activate and deactivate it. At the beginning of each shift, the VIPS checked out police radio equipment and completed a boat checksheet. They signed on the air using assigned call numbers and were entered into our CAD system for tracking purposes. At the conclusion of their shift they completed activity sheets that detailed their activities. All of the checksheets and activity sheets were submitted to the supervising sergeant daily. The data was collated and retained for reference. All of the activity data was then forwarded to the Police Chief's office for review.

Before any recruitment was undertaken, we created policies on the recruitment, selection, screening, training, retention and behavior of our volunteers. Volunteers must meet the following selection criteria:

18 years of age

Possess a valid Florida Safe Boaters license or Safe Boating course or equivalent

Complete an application and sign the hold harmless agreement

No adverse criminal history

No adverse health conditions

The policies that were created and the selection and training requirements allowed us to impart a clear grasp of the volunteer roles and the program goals to every stakeholder. After screening, about 32 VIPS were selected for Coastwatch and notified to attend one of two training sessions scheduled. The training lasted for 4 hours and then each was assigned to ride with an experienced boat operator for another 4 hours of field operations. After completion of the entire process, the volunteers were scheduled for work. We had just rejuvenated our VIPS force and also have 45 VIPS working for us on our road patrols. The timing of the increase was serendipitous, as our need for volunteers had skyrocketed with the creation of the Coastwatch in the response to the oil disaster looming in the Gulf of Mexico that threatened our community.

The community policing program we have in place has allowed us to focus our response directly at the problem. We were able to recruit and train a group of volunteers who greatly assisted us to reduce crimes associated with the protective booms such as larceny and vandalism. By involving the homeowners and boat operators, we obtained expertise immediately in boat operations and in the layout of the coast and the marine environment. Our city utilized the services of an environmental expert to determine the most sensitive areas in need of protection. We were able to use the police officers to deliver a notification to each household on the water when the bayous were closed and navigation halted. It allowed our homeowners ample time to retrieve their boats from their lifts and protect them on land when we were in hurricane season. BP provided basic hazmat training to our Coastwatchers so they would be safe when encountering oil. The media coverage aided greatly in informing our citizens of our efforts and enhancing their sense of security. The use of the police boat assured that our volunteers were not placing their own vessels at risk of damage from use or from oil. The city paid for the fuel, oil and maintenance of the police boat. The use of the boat provided a very visible reminder to our citizens that we were on the front line and ready to do all we could to protect our community from the oil disaster.

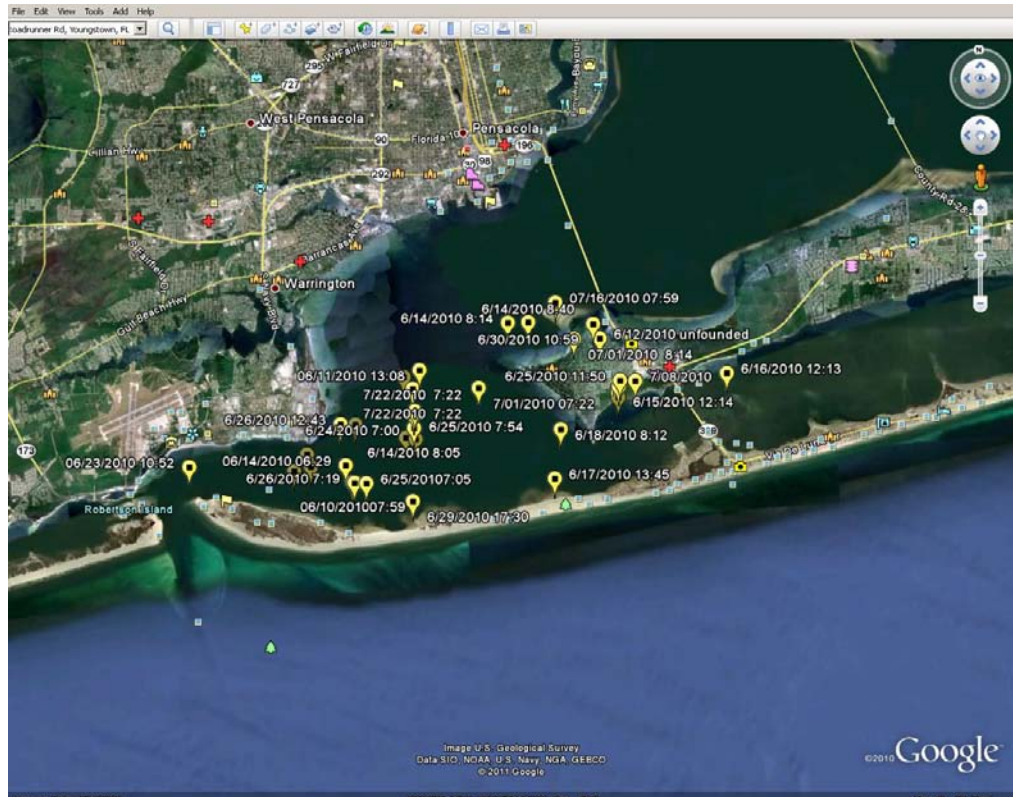
The most recent creation of the Coastwatch program clearly demonstrated the commitment of our volunteers to the community and has enabled us to respond quickly and meaningfully to a looming catastrophe. The Coastwatch program was put together within a week by using the VIPS policies and procedures and applying our VIPS model to the marine environment. We already had success using VIPS to drive police cars for a limited purpose, using them to operate our boat was an easy and logical adaptation. The Gulf Breeze VIPS program is a valuable aide to the Gulf Breeze Police Department service delivery to the community. Their efforts have demonstrated positive results,

have achieved the goals initially established for the program and have brought new initiatives and additional benefits to our officers and the citizens of the community.

Assessment

We did not have any complaints of larceny or intentional damage to booms since our Coastwatch program began active patrols. We were able to shuttle additional personnel to Deadman's Island in the city to assist in placing protective material to mitigate any oil that may strike environmentally sensitive oyster beds and a critical archeological site that is being preserved. We transported the city's environmental expert to many marine locations as preparations were being completed for the oil strike.

Our volunteers were operating daily, 3 shifts each day, 7 days a week. Oil struck our area, but did not strike our city coastline. We remained vigilant and were in



Locations of oil surrounding City of Gulf during BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster detected and reported by Coastwatchers from June through September 2010 preventing oil landfall to the city coast and environmentally sensitive areas.

communication with the city hazmat team and with BP response teams to respond to waterborne oil. Oil had been spotted by our Coastwatch boat which was the first city resource on scene. The boat operators provided accurate GPS coordinates for the oil which was called in to Unified Command, the Florida Emergency Operations Center, and BP call-in center immediately. They were able to communicate directly with our Fire Department HazMat response team and also were able to pick up the city Environmental Specialist and bring her to the scene to collect samples and monitor clean up operations.

We received numerous comments from our residents that they appreciated all of the efforts that they saw on their behalf and knew that everything that could be done was being done to mitigate this environmental disaster. Maintaining the confidence and spirits of the community in the path of this catastrophe was significant and can not be overstated. Preserving the vital and very expensive protective boom placements was essential to mitigating this disaster and our Coastwatchers were successful in eliminating damage or loss since they began patrols.

The plan to identify approaching oil and to interdict it was primarily created by the group specifically affected by it, the residents themselves. With the support of the city fathers, the initiative began in May. The waterfront residents, the boaters in the community and the model of our successful Volunteers in Police Service program served as the backbone of the project. The police could not have brought this matter to a successful resolution by themselves. Recent budgetary cuts due to the poor economy mothballed our marine unit. We still had the equipment resources, but our reduced staff could not have been tasked with adding waterborne patrols. Law enforcement would have continued to take reports of boom theft, vandalism to protective boom and boom missing indefinitely. The reports would have driven our UCR numbers up dramatically due to the high value and thousands of feet of boom valued at \$20 per foot. Something needed to be done to keep the oil out of the city wetlands, environmentally sensitive areas; critical archeological site on the water or homeowners would have begun independent action. Before the occurrence of oil making landfall, positive and immediate steps were needed. By devising a plan that both encouraged positive activity and employed community volunteer resources to succeed; our enforcement efforts were adequate to achieve success. The crucial piece of the plan was the input and buy-in from the residents. They were solicited at the outset and all other stakeholders were brought to the table as well. By presenting them with the problem and seeking their input to create a solution; real results were achieved. The commitment of the city leaders and city residents was utilized. The former marine patrol police officers, police dispatch communications and coordination with the city contracted environmental specialist was our principal increase from routine patrol. By supplementing our patrol force with shore-based waterfront residents and allocating our marine resources for the citizen volunteers to work daybreak, midday, and early evening shifts 7 days a week, any oil that was out in the water was immediately detected and intercepted. Our boom was checked very frequently and none went missing, was stolen or vandalized since our Coastwatchers began their patrols. The first report of oil in the city was detected by the Coastwatch on the police boat and was forwarded to unified command, the state warning point and to BP for action. The amount of additional hours committed during the month by the Gulf Breeze Police Department was about .25 FTEs or about 40 hours. Of that total, the entire costs of personnel and fuel, oil and repairs was submitted to BP for reimbursement. Given the significance of our efforts and the outstanding results achieved; it is felt that the budgetary costs were reasonable and justifiable.

It is very clear that all aspects of the community need to become involved to achieve meaningful solution to problems. A fundamental aspect of community policing is the involvement of the community and the participation of stakeholders. The failure of law

enforcement in the 1980s to control the rising crime rate was, in large part, due to the mindset that it was a problem to be solved by law enforcement alone. As in the solution to many problems, the stakeholders greatly influence the outcome and affect the results. By empowering all stakeholders and recognizing the value of each participant's input, the process is respected and the results are adopted more easily and fully. We used this approach and employed our VIPS model to address a much broader issue than crime in the community. Bringing all of these aspects to bear on the problem created positive and overwhelming results. Each element of the community that had a stake in the problem also had input in the solution. By seeking and implementing a comprehensive solution to the problem, real success was achieved and the results were measurable using any objective and applicable standard. City Council members were kept apprised of each step of the process to avoid the potential of political pressure being brought to bear on them to subvert progress made by the committee working on the problem. It was educational to work with the City Council, as one of the first suggestions made to solve the problem was the installation of protective booms across our bayous. It would have had significant political implications to the City Council due to the potential for complaints from boaters and pressure to keep the bayous open; which would have placed all of the waterfront properties, the wetlands and the boaters at risk of significant harm. Extensive and open communication was the basis of the project and a hallmark of its' success. The ability to communicate the scope of the problem, the plan for resolution, the input of the residents and the consequences for deviation were essential to the project's success. By creating a plan that had validity and support from all aspects of the community, the actual costs to implement the plan were modest. Getting to the source of the problem was the key. Identifying the root cause and then bringing all of the resources used to bear upon that cause solved the problem. We were proactive, focused and responsive to issues that arose. We did not wait and hope that BP or others could help us. We chose to act in partnership with our community. The plan has worked and we have succeeded in locating oil almost 4 miles from our coast and preventing it from making landfall in our city. Oil never did make landfall in our community and was detected many times by our Coastwatch and cleaned up while still waterborne. It is notable that the solution to the problem created bonds that still exist between the police and the community. Rather than implement a plan that caused friction or alienated an element of the community, the plan brought all elements together, solved the problem and created lasted relationships that can be used for future initiatives.

Agency and Officer Information

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