



THE CITY OF

# SAN DIEGO

POLICE DEPARTMENT • 1401 BROADWAY  
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101 - 5729 • TELEPHONE (619) 531-2000

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OFFICE OF  
JERRY SANDERS  
CHIEF OF POLICE

IN REPLYING  
PLEASE GIVE

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July 20, 1995

Mr. John Lusardi  
Police Executive Research Forum  
1120 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 930  
Washington DC, 20037

Dear John,

As a result of the Polly Klaas abduction and murder in Northern California, San Diego Police Detective Sergeant Joanne Welter and Detective Sharon McNair began to examine our procedures for properly documenting repeat sex offenders. They found that sex registrants were not being held accountable for properly registering with authorities upon their release from prison.

Further analysis showed that the four units that shared the responsibility for registrant's file, the police Sex Crimes Unit, the Crime Analysis Unit, the Records Division and the State Department of Justice, did not properly communicate with each other concerning this problem. Detective Sergeant Welter and Detective McNair organized the units, established communications, arranged for media involvement, revamped the system and coordinated "sweeps" to round up delinquent registrants.

This was a very successful inter - agency, police - media partnership, I am pleased to recommend them for the annual Herman Goldstein Excellence in Problem Solving Award,

Sincerely,

Jerry Sanders  
Chief of Police



DIVERSITY  
BRINGS US ALL TOGETHER

**HERMAN GOLDSTEIN EXCELLENCE  
IN PROBLEM SOLVING APPLICATION**

**Project Title: 290 PC/Sex Offender Registration Program**

- **What was the Problem?**

On October 1, 1993, 12 year old Polly Klaas was in her bedroom with two girlfriends who were staying the night for a slumber party at her home in Petaluma, California. At some point during the night, Richard Allen Davis, walked through Polly's unlocked front door. Davis asked the girls which one of them lived in the home. He then tied up Polly's two friends and abducted Polly while her mother slept in another part of the house. Two months later, Polly was found dead in an open field within 30 miles of her home. This incident created a public outcry when it was learned that Davis had prior kidnapping convictions and had recently been released from prison.

Law enforcement agencies are inconsistent in the procedures used to register sex offenders. As an example, some agencies have detectives personally interview registrants while other agencies have Records personnel complete the necessary forms with no attempts to gather further criminal intelligence. Each agency creates their own procedures and the information obtained may or may not be entered into a local computer system. Modus operandi, tatoos, vehicle descriptions, weapons, paraphernalia and other important information is collected indiscriminately. Even if the information is entered into a local data bank, there is no guarantee that the information will be forwarded to the Department of Justice, the designated custodian of records for registered sex offenders throughout the State of California.

The abduction and murder of Polly Klaas forced California law enforcement to recognize the need for a much better system and more resources to identify, track, investigate and prosecute sex offenders. As a result, DOJ allocated 7.8 million dollars to automate and update the statewide computer system. Although the Sexual Habitual Offender Program began in Northern California in 1989, statewide expansion was not expected until 1997. The San Diego Police Department's Sex Crimes Unit learned about DOJ's goals in the Spring of 1993. As a result of the community concern stemming from the Polly Klaas incident, the San Diego Police Department, in cooperation with DOJ, began implementing SHOP in Southern California by sponsoring a Conference in San Diego on May 26, 1994. Over 135 San Diego County law enforcement representatives attended the conference.

Initially, we did not appreciate how the entire 290 program is an integral part of the Sexual Habitual Offender Program. Realistically, Polly Klaas' murderer would not have qualified as a habitual offender. However, if communication had existed between local agencies, they could have easily determined that a subject with kidnapping priors had recently been released from prison. Therefore, in addition to identifying and tracking habitual offenders, we recognized the need to revamp our entire registration program to make it effective and worthwhile.

• **Who was affected by the problem and how were they affected?**

California has approximately 65,000 documented registered sex offenders and every month, between 200 and 300 sex offenders are paroled from the Department of Corrections onto the streets of

California. San Diego County has approximately 5,000 registered sex offenders; 2800 of these registrants live within the City of San Diego.

The community and law enforcement are both affected by the repulsive crimes sex offenders commit. In addition, many sex offenders are predators and repeat offenders. During recent years, community organizations and individuals have made strong demands for sex offender information to be made available to the public. For the first time in California, as of July 3, 1995, private citizens can now call a 1-9 00 number to see if an individual is a registered sex offender. At the least, the community needs to believe that law enforcement officials have timely and accurate information about sex offenders being released daily into their communities.

Law enforcement representatives are also seriously affected by tragic cases like Polly Klaas. The investigations are frustrating, disheartening, time consuming and costly. Law enforcement officers need **immediate** access to **accurate**, up to date, statewide sex offender information. In addition, relationships need to be established and reliable information needs to be constantly exchanged between Probation, Municipal Police, Sheriff's, District Attorney's, Department of Corrections, Institutions, Parole, FBI and US Customs about sex offenders residing within their communities and jurisdictions.

- How did the Department handle the problem in the past?

Although the San Diego Police Department's Records Division is our official Custodian of Record, the Sex Crimes Unit manages the

sex offender registration program. Sex offenders are allowed to register in the Records Division on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 0800 and 1100 hours. A detective interviews the offender, fingerprints and a current photograph are taken and the information is forwarded to Crime Analysis for data entry. At completion, the basic data required by DOJ is forwarded to DOJ's Sex/Arson/Narcotic Registration Unit for entry into the statewide computer system. However, the information forwarded is very limited and often, there is a six month delay in data entry by DOJ personnel. Even worse, sex offender files could only be accessed by Sex Crimes and Records personnel making it even more useless to the officer on the street.

- **What information was collected about the problem?**

We requested lists of all sex offender files maintained by Records, Crime Analysis, DOJ and Sex Crimes. We analyzed the different systems and scheduled meetings with all the Units involved in the registration program within the Department. We also met with representatives from numerous other law enforcement agencies and we regularly talked to or met with personnel from DOJ's SHOP and Sex Offender Registration Programs. We discussed the problems and determined the following:

Neither the Sex Crimes Unit, Crime Analysis, Records personnel or DOJ Representatives ever communicated with each other or reconciled their records. None of the Units involved actually understood how the entire system was supposed to work or what happened to the information once it was forwarded to the next Unit. When we began to review the program, we discovered Crime Analysis was missing 1200 files compared to DOJ's records. This occurred

because although sex offender registration is a lifetime requirement, our sex offender registration program wasn't computerized until the mid 80's and offenders who had registered prior to that time were not entered into the computer base.

In addition, although California law requires registrants to advise local law enforcement when they leave our jurisdiction, this is rarely done and infrequently enforced by prosecuting agencies. Furthermore, there are some exceptions to the life-time registration requirement, meaning that agencies must track those exceptions and routinely purge their files. We also learned that subjects not required to register by law, are frequently required to register as sex offenders as a condition of their parole or probation. Once the parole or probation expires, the subject is no longer required to register but law enforcement rarely receives this information and the file is retained indefinitely causing major discrepancies. Additionally, no system had been established to query whether an offender might still be alive and if deceased, how to purge the record from all the different tracking systems.

We also spoke to patrol officers and listened to the problems they encountered when they attempted to access sex offender information or arrest sex offenders in violation of their registration requirements.

- **What were the difficulties encountered by the problem solvers?**

Initially, we believed that the sex offender program could be revamped within one year. Once we seriously began to look at the program and the beginnings of an effective system, we realized it would probably take at least two years. Like other agencies faced

with budget crunches, we had to work on this project without an increase in our budget or staff. Given our case load, it would have been inefficient and impossible for detectives to work on this program. As a result, we recruited the assistance of University students majoring in Psychology, Criminal Justice and Sociology to work as Interns. As of this date, we have had nine Interns from a number of different schools including Universities in San Diego, Topeka, Kansas, Seattle, Washington, El Mira, New York and Normal, Illinois. The Interns have invested thousands of hours in the program and their outstanding work has been recognized by our Department and the Department of Justice.

- **What was the goal of the problem solving effort?**
  1. To create policies and procedures that would foster an efficient and productive sex offender registration program within the City of San Diego.
  2. To reconcile sex offender files maintained by Sex Crimes, Crime Analysis, Records and DOJ.
  3. To identify and track every sex offender registered within the City of San Diego. Once the offender is located or status determined, hard copy files and computer files are updated. Tracking includes notifying other jurisdictions in California and throughout the United States once information is obtained indicating an offender has relocated to their area.
  4. To evaluate every sex offender record maintained by the San Diego Police Department to determine which offenders qualify as habitual offenders per California State Law.

5. To give officers immediate access to accurate and up to date sex offender registration information. This includes providing each Division with complete records of offenders living within the communities they patrol.

• What strategies were developed to reach that goal?

We established communication and a first name working relationship with all of the agencies and units involved with the 290/SHOP programs. We provided everyone involved with complete information about the entire program and the purpose of the statewide sex offender registration program in addition to providing ongoing training as the program evolved. As a team, we created policies and procedures delineating the different roles and responsibilities of each Unit involved in the registration process.

We recognized the need to check on the status of each and every sex offender registered in San Diego. DOJ and several other law enforcement agencies throughout California have created special task forces to track and identify habitual offenders. As a result of further discussions and brainstorming sessions, we decided that at least initially, we did not want to only target those registrants identified as habitual offenders. We strongly believe that beat officers need to know who the sex offenders are that reside within the communities they patrol. The challenge was in determining how to conduct citywide sweeps without additional officers or specialized units. In response, Sex Crimes staff met with Commanding Officer's at the Chief's Executive Committee to present the problem and to gain their approval and support to allocate personnel to conduct the sweeps. The Captains were very



enthusiastic and they recommended a follow-up meeting with their Executive Lieutenants. Although the Executive Lieutenants were challenging and prepared with numerous questions, they were also responsive and each of the seven Commands designated a SHOP liaison- It was then decided that each Division would operate their sweep based on the Command's uniqueness, i.e., staffing levels, whether they were already practicing Neighborhood Policing, whether they had Neighborhood Policing Teams or other specialized units they could deploy, and the number of sex offenders residing within their geographical area.

We divided the offenders into communities and/or beats. Crime Analysis continued to assist Sex Crimes and Patrol by compiling packages including all the information we had on each offender. Sex Crimes, Crime Analysis and personnel from the District Attorney's Office provided each Command with training to insure that they understood our goals and were complying with state law.

We solicited assistance from the media to alert the public about the upcoming sweeps in an effort to have offenders voluntarily comply with registration requirements.

We met with the District Attorney and the City Attorney's Offices to insure that offenders would be aggressively prosecuted when arrested for registration violations.

We established monthly SHOP Coordinator meetings with law enforcement agencies throughout San Diego County to provide a forum for an open exchange of information.

We produced a training video explaining how officers can now access statewide sex offender information through their Mobile Data

Terminals (MDT's) and how they can use their MDT to leave immediate contact messages for Parole, Probation and other interested agencies which is then relayed by the Department of Justice within 24 hours.

- **What agencies helped the police department achieve their goal?**

We received assistance from the Department of Justice, the University of San Diego, Probation, surrounding Municipal Police Agencies, University of California Police, the Sheriff's Office, the City Attorney's office, the District Attorney's office, the Department of Corrections, State Parole, the FBI, Naval Criminal Intelligence, California Youth Authority, US Customs and local media.

- **Was the goal accomplished?**

Our entire sex offender registration program has been refurbished. Effective procedures are in place and our records continue to be reconciled. Five of our seven Divisions have completed their 290 sweeps with extremely positive results. Because of media attention, many registrants have voluntarily appeared at the Department wanting to register rather than face possible arrest. All of our sex offender files have been reviewed and habitual offenders have been so designated and separated from the general sex offender population. As a result of the 290 sweeps and the reconciliation of our records, patrol officers have access to sex offender records and are now guaranteed accurate and up to date information. Training has also been conducted instructing officers how they can access statewide sex offender information through their mobile data terminals.

As a result of our work, and a change in the law making a sex registrant violation a felony as of January 1, 1995, we recently budgeted for a full-time detective to process arrests and serve as the SHOP Coordinator for the Department. The next phase of the program includes completing comprehensive profiles on each habitual offender. This is time consuming work since many of the records needed are maintained by agencies throughout California and frequently, original investigations are purged by the time a sex offender is released from prison. The Sex Crimes Unit and student interns, however, continue to enthusiastically work on this project because the information gained will be a tremendous benefit to law enforcement and citizens everywhere.