

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Lt. F. J. Callegari
Commander, Arizona Department of Public Safety
Gang Intelligence Team Enforcement Mission
1230 E. Pennsylvania Street #101
Tucson, Arizona 85714
(520) 746-4571 (phone)
(520) 746-4559 (fax)

Sgt. K. Summers
Gang Intelligence Team Enforcement Mission
1230 E. Pennsylvania Street #101
Tucson, Arizona 85714
(520) 746-4571 (phone)
(520) 746-4559 (fax)

PROBLEM ORIENTED POLICING OPERATION STREET SWEEP

ABSTRACT:

The city of South Tucson (a square mile city surrounded by the city of Tucson) had an elevated street crime problem involving assaults, narcotics, prostitution, thefts, burglary, drive by shootings, and homicides. The city of South Tucson had a history of these types of crimes and the violence related to these crimes appeared to be increasing. In 1997 the community and the south Tucson City Council had strong concerns on being able to control these crimes. A new Police Chief had just been hired and was tasked with addressing the problem.

A review of the crimes showed that a large percentage were related to a street gang and narcotics trafficking . Further review indicated that the BARRIO LIBRE STREET GANG controlled the illegal street activity by using intimidation and assaults to control the area so as to ply their drug trade.

After the review the city of South Tucson felt they did not have the resources to address the problem. Assistance was requested from federal, state, and local authority. Funds, manpower, investigative assistance, and enforcement efforts were requested. Both short term and long term solutions to the problem were discussed. A weed and seed program was implemented. Plans were made and implemented for undercover officers to make direct hand-to-hand narcotic buys from gang members. Electronic and video surveillance measures were implemented. Analysts were used to identify which gang members to target. Uniformed gang and city patrol officers were assigned to make high visibility patrols in the area with zero tolerance enforcement and to gather intelligence. Prosecutors were involved prior to enforcement activity to ensure the suspects would not be allowed to return to the area after arrests were made. A high profile arrest round-up was made on the main suspected gang members with news media coverage. Follow-up uniformed gang, city patrol officers, and safe street programs were made to ensure law enforcement presence in the area.

A year later showed that serious crime in the city of South Tucson dropped almost 25%. City patrol officers have been having trouble finding drug dealers on the street.

DESCRIPTION:

The city of South Tucson (a square mile city surrounded by the city of Tucson) had an elevated street crime problem. The most notable crimes were assault, narcotic violations, prostitution, theft, burglary, drive-by shootings, and homicides. South Tucson had a history of these types of crimes and the violence related to these crimes appeared to be increasing. Community leaders and the City Council voiced strong concerns as the crimes became a common day occurrence. A new police chief (Chief Sixto Molina) had recently been hired and was tasked with addressing the problem. Chief Molina's initial review of the problem led him to believe that a majority of the crimes were related to narcotic violations and a criminal street gang (the Barrio Libre Gang) that controlled the narcotics in the city. Chief Molina believing he did not have the resources in his own department to solve the problem, requested assistance from GITEM (the state gang task force), the U.S. Attorney's Office, the Pima County Attorney's Office, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Pima County Sheriffs Office "Safe Streets Program".

Several meetings were held on how to address the problem. A grant was requested and obtained for the city from the federal Weed & Seed Program. Short term goals would have law enforcement agencies working together addressing the immediate criminal problems and removing them. Long term goals would focus on crime prevention and neighborhood restoration projects.

GITEM uniformed gang officers along with South Tucson uniformed officers were tasked with going into areas claimed by the Barrio Libre Gang with a zero tolerance enforcement plan to gain street intelligence on the hierarchy of the Barrio Libre Gang. The GITEM analyst was tasked with reviewing past and current police reports, intelligence and gang bulletins, and the current information being provided by the officers on the street.

The GITEM analyst was able to develop a fact sheet and link analysis chart on the Barrio Libre Gang:

- * It is one of the oldest gangs in Pima County with origins in the 1920's.
- * The gang composition is primarily Hispanic, but does have Native Americans and Blacks as members.
- * There are 168 documented gang members and at least 150 suspected gang members and criminal associates.
- * 26% have Arizona Department of Corrections/Department of Justice criminal records.
- * 46% have felony records.
- * 28% have narcotics' convictions.
- * 27% are minors
- * 27% have theft/larceny/grand theft auto/burglary in their criminal history.
- * Almost 5% are Mexican nationals or naturalized citizens.

Electronic surveillance (pole cameras) was installed to cover areas with high narcotic trafficking to document the gang's activities and how the gang operated. The leaders of the gang were identified. GITEM and Drug Enforcement Administration undercover officers were instructed to initiate a buy program from the leaders of the gang and to make multiple buys to show that it was a continuing enterprise.

South Tucson Police and GITEM uniformed gang officers along with Pima County Sheriffs Deputies (Safe Streets Program) intensified their patrols. Several high visibility (utilizing news media) gang suppression/zero tolerance details were performed.

After nine months of investigation, the Barrio Libre Gang case was presented to the U.S. Attorney's Office for prosecution. Eighteen key members of the gang were indicted by a Federal Grand Jury for Drug Trafficking and Conspiracy. Several state charges and warrants were obtained on members of the gang and their associates.

On July 21, 1998, fifty federal, state, and local officers served search and arrest warrants on members of the Barrio Libre Gang. Fifteen of the key eighteen members were taken into custody. Six other gang members were taken into custody on state arrest warrants. The two indicted gang members were taken into custody on a later date. There is one outstanding fugitive.

The key gang members were unable to post bond or be released from custody pending trial. This in effect immediately shut down the gang's activities with no leadership. Remaining gang members vanished from the streets afraid that they would be arrested next and not sure on whom they could trust. Chief Molina said "it was like the drug dealers were paralyzed"; his uniformed officers were having trouble finding drug dealers on the street.

It appears that illegal street gang activity has slowed in the city of South Tucson and the remaining Barrio Libre Gang members know that their activities are to be scrutinized. A follow-up major gang suppression detail in South Tucson was performed in August of 1998. Other follow-up details will be scheduled in the future.

Sixteen of the eighteen gang members indicted by the Federal Grand Jury plead guilty to drug trafficking charges and were sentenced to prison. Charges against one gang member were dismissed on a technicality and one gang member remains a fugitive and is believed to be hiding in Mexico. Chief Sixto Molina of the South Tucson Police Department issued a press release on February 10, 1999. The press release documented the dramatic drop in crime in his community:

CRIMES COMMITTED

Offense	1997	1998
Homicides	4	3
Rape	14	6
Robberies	91	57
Assaults	511	395
Burglaries	225	168
Larceny	587	477
Auto Theft	122	98
Arson	1	4

The GITEM analyst has tracked members of the Barrio Libre Gang in the prison system. Prison officials have advised they have intercepted correspondence between gang members. This correspondence indicates that because of the emphasis that was placed on them by the GITEM gang unit, that when they're released they are going to relocate to somewhere else and not return to South Tucson.

GITEM gang patrol and targeting units in cooperation with federal and local agencies, can make a measurable impact on gang activity in a geographical area. Most important, felony charges which can lead to prison sentences, removes the gang member for a significant period of time from the affected community.