

**THE 1998 HERMAN GOLDSTEIN AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE
IN PROBLEM-ORIENTED POLICING
ONTARIO POLICE DEPARTMENT**

ABSTRACT

"DRIVERS LICENSE CHECK POINTS"

In 1996, the traffic division of the Ontario Police Department recognized that the City was experiencing an inordinate amount of property damage, injuries and deaths due to a combination of traffic related problems. By scanning traffic accident reports for causation factors, traffic personnel were able to identify two major areas of contributing elements.

The first area of concern was the exorbitant number of unlicensed motorists on our City Streets. Most of these had lost their driving privileges due to previous unsafe driving incidents. Frequently the lack of a license was coupled with the lack of current registration. Many of the vehicles were also being operated in a hazardous condition and had no insurance. Trying to rectify this problem through routine traffic stops had proven unsuccessful. The perpetrators only added the citation to their unpaid collection of tickets.

The second group of drivers were those operating a vehicle under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol. Many of these were not first time offenders.

The law in California states that the police department must impound vehicles for thirty days when they are found to be driven by unlicensed drivers. This was the tool we needed. For the past three years, Ontario has been operating monthly "Drivers License Check Points" that have resulted in the impounding of 6,090 vehicle. The date, time and location of each of these check-points has been announced in the newspaper prior to the event. The cost of this operation has been absorbed by fees to the drivers and to the tow services. The number of vehicles impounded in 1998 showed a significant decline. This is attribute to the fact that our citizens are following the law or refraining from driving a vehicle. The results are evident in a 50% reduction in serious injury and fatal traffic accidents in the City of Ontario.

DRIVERS LICENSE CHECK POINTS

ONTARIO POLICE DEPARTMENT

SCANNING:

The Ontario Police Department Traffic Division is responsible for keeping statistical records on traffic related problems. This information is, in turn, reported via the Statewide Traffic Reporting System (SWTRS) Report to state officials in Sacramento. In 1996, traffic personnel observed that our injury and fatal traffic accidents were climbing at an inordinate rate. This high rate of injuries and deaths was unacceptable for the amount of traffic in Ontario.

ANALYSIS:

Employees were assigned to scan old accident reports and to report on any major causes. Each accident report lists the primary and secondary collision factors of the accident and who was at fault. We were also able to record vehicle types, drivers license, registration, insurance, and sobriety of the drivers. It took very little analysis to ascertain that many of our at-fault drivers were unlicensed, unregistered, uninsured motorists often under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol.

Our response to these types of individuals had always been to increase our enforcement by writing tickets. This had not been very successful as the ticket recipients had no intention of paying their fines.

In the past we had addressed the alcohol problem by applying for a state grant through Alcohol Beverage Control (ABC). The City had a very high number of on-sale taverns and off-sale liquor stores that had been identified as problems. The one year grant supported one officer and one technician to work ABC violations. Several of the worst offenders were closed down. Many meetings were held with stakeholders in reference to the distribution and use of alcohol in Ontario.

RESPONSE:

The original idea was to go back to the enforcement plan of running a drunk-driver-car and increasing citations. What occurred to staff was a recent vehicle code section would be the answer. This section directed officers to impound vehicles driven by unlicensed motorists and to hold them for 30 days. To find these unlicensed drivers it would be necessary to place vehicle checks on strategically located thoroughfares and to do so in the least obtrusive way possible. These vehicle checks had already been held to be Constitutional.

Each time that there was a Drivers License Check Point, the date, time, and location of the event was published in the newspaper well in advance. Large signs would be strategically located announcing "Vehicle License Check Point Ahead". Enough officers were deployed that the traffic moved through swiftly and the public was not unnecessarily detained. A mobile command post was placed nearby to handle the occasional warrant or drunk driving arrests that occurred. Tow trucks were standing by to take the impounds away. Each month, members of the Traffic Division, COPS Division, Bicycle Unit, Senior Volunteers, and Explorers, operate the check points.

We were, of course, concerned about disturbing our citizens with this program. Therefore, we took the time to inform them about what we were doing and why. The results are that there have been no complaints from the public.. They understand that this program brings down the cost of insurance and makes their streets safer.

Because of the amount of time and expense involved in conducting a major operation on a monthly basis, staff studied the idea of operating our own storage lot to recoup fees. Our three tow companies offered to share their fees with the department while they continued to operate their own tow yards. This was the best solution possible. The department receives \$300 per car when the owner picks it up. We also charge \$75 to process a vehicle release. To date, the department has recouped over \$500,000, which pays for all of our operational expenses.

Members of other police departments, (both locally and out-of-county), have studied our program then implemented the Drivers License Check Points in their area. Their success has been comparable to ours.

ASSESSMENT:

Each time a check point was held, statistics were kept on the number of impounds, citations, and arrests. In 1996, 2,700 cars were placed in 30-day impound-a department-wide effort. In 1997, the number jumped to 2,896. Finally, in 1998, the number of impounds reached 2,898. We expect that at some point the numbers will begin to decline as many of these cars do not return to our roadways. They are eventually sold at lien sales. The drivers are aware of the consequences of driving without

a license and registration and either comply or do not drive.

After the first year of this program, staff again looked at the statistics for injury and fatal traffic

accidents. The number had dropped by 50%. This amazing decline has remained constant since that time.

AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION:

All officers in the department are trained in the POPS program and are impounding cars when the conditions are warranted. The special task force, however, has made the most significant attack on the problem.

Whenever an officer identifies a POP problem in his beat, he is allowed to participate in the solution. This often means having someone else work their beat while they participate.

In this program, the involved staff was familiar with vehicle check points from previous narcotics programs run by the department. The most important issue to us was public support. It is essential that the community be educated before the program starts and that the Check Points move swiftly so as not to impede their commute. Most of the participants are temporarily reassigned to this project with adjustments in their hours. Some extra officers are brought in on an overtime basis. Most of the support personnel are volunteers. Vehicle fees more than adequately compensate the department for the cost of this program.

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