

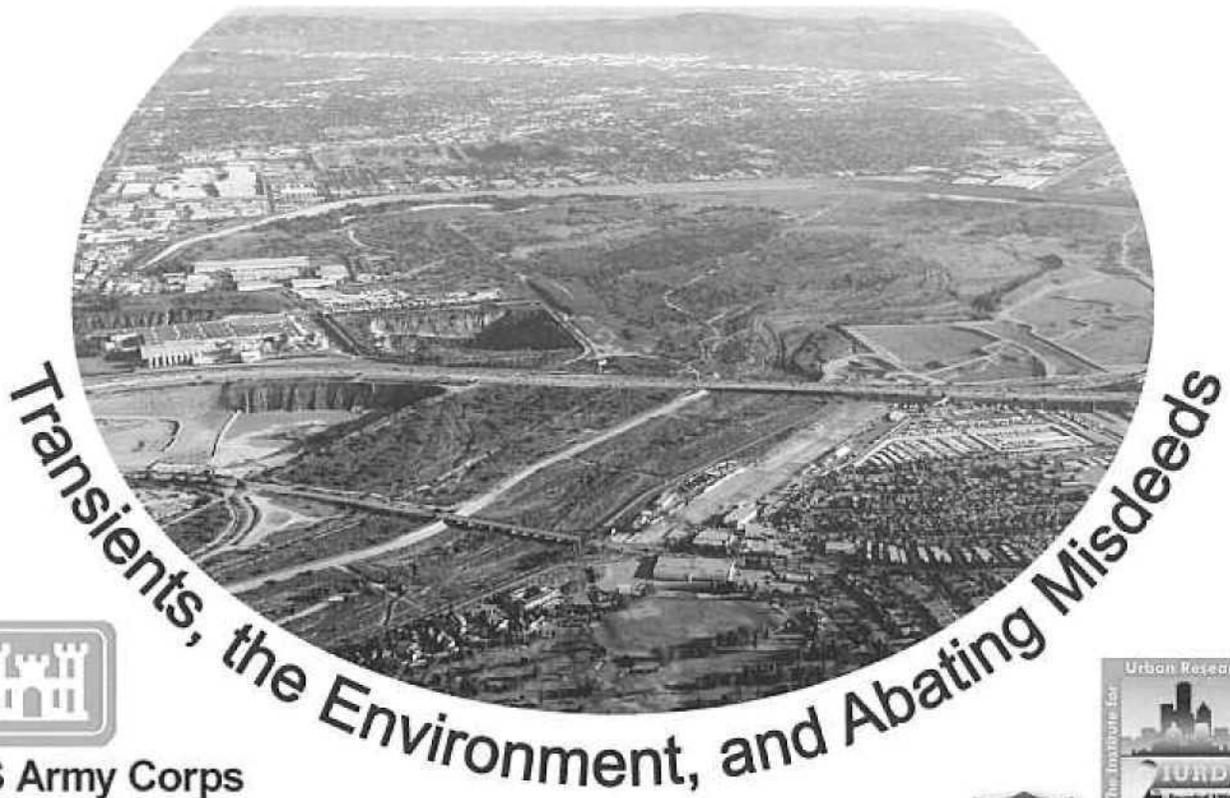


Irwindale Police Department

5050 N. Irwindale Avenue, Irwindale CA 91706 (626) 430-2244

ACT TEAM

Agencies Concerned Together for



**US Army Corps
of Engineers®**

Los Angeles District





Irwindale Police Department ACT TEAM

Letter from Irwindale Police Chief Joe De Laduraiuey.....I
Summary of ACT TEAM Project.....2
Description and Detailed **Presentation** of ACT TEAM Project.....3
Agency and Officer Information.....4
ACT TEAM Photographs.....5
Calls for Service Chart.....6
ACT TEAM Homeless Detail Chart.....7
Newspaper Articles
 San Gabriel Valley Tribune - **Teenager** Drowns in Pond.....S
 San Gabriel Valley Tribune - Coalition Aids Homeless.....9
 San Gabriel Valley Tribune - East Valley Needs Homeless Help.....10
 US Army Corps of **Engineers** - Base Crew* Work With Cops....., 11



Irwindale Police Department ACT TEAM

Letter from Irwindale Police Chief Joe De Ladurantey

JOSEPH C. DE LADURANTEY
Chief of Police
(626) 430-2244



June 9, 2004

Rob Gueretie
Goldstein Award Coordinator
School of Criminal Justice
Rutgers University-Newark
123 Washington Street
Newark, NJ 07102-3094

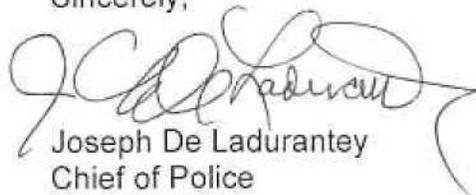
Dear Herman Goldstein Award Selection Committee:

On behalf of the Irwindale Police Department, I would like to nominate the "ACT TEAM" (Agencies Concerned Together for Transients, Environment, and Abating Misdeeds) Project for the Herman Goldstein Award. The project was implemented with great success. Federal, State and local agencies worked together to achieve the goal of cleaning out the area for fire access, removing all homeless encampments, protecting the environment, and obtaining help for the homeless who desired it.

The results have been tremendous (20) homeless persons were relocated, and the encampments have been cleaned out. The shrubbery was pruned to stimulate new growth and ornithologists advise that the endangered bird species population seems to have increased. The area was prone to arson fires they have decreased by over 98%. Property crimes and crimes against persons have also declined, including panhandling complaints, lewd conduct issues, drunk in public, vandalism, petty thefts, and assaults.

With the enormous time, effort, and determination of the 'ACT TEAM'¹ the focus area of Irwindale has been saved for future generations to enjoy.

Sincerely,



Joseph De Ladurantey
Chief of Police





Irwindale Police Department ACT TEAM

Summary of ACT TEAM Project

Irwindate Police Department ACT TEAM Summary

Project Title and Background

The project title is "ACT TEAM - Homeless and Environmental Healing"¹ The Santa Fe Dam is the focus area, and contains protected biological communities, endangered and protected animals in an area used by the public. An ever-increasing transient population has been detrimental to this habitat, and a concern to public health and safety. Several local, federal & state agencies, environmentalists, homeless advocates, and citizens have worked jointly to effect a permanent change. The group formed is called the "ACT TEAM" (Agencies Concerned Together for Transients, the Environment, and Abating Misdeeds).

1- Scanning

After months of first-hand observations, several weeks of casual meetings with local police agencies, fire departments, the US Army Corps of Engineers, bike trail users, and citizens who go into and hike within the park, we have made the following observations:

- There is a high concentration of transient encampments within the area
- Demands for services in the area by all agencies were disproportionate.
- Unusually high concentration of crimes in the area.
- The same persons were continually contacted.
- Perimeter fences are compromised to the point of being useless, or bypassed.
- Fire roads are overgrown and inadequate for current fire apparatus.
- Broken glass, trash, and the indiscriminate cutting of indigenous trees & vegetation by transients to build shelter were destroying the natural habitat of federally protected species; one listed as endangered.

2. Analysis

The problem was analyzed by direct survey of the area, historical records of calls for service, interviews with users of the area, and the observation of the area by patrol and ACT TEAM agencies. Crime analysis revealed the root cause to be the transients.

3. Response

The Irwindale Police Department decided to commit itself to a leading role in solving this public safety and disorder issue from a standpoint of addressing all of the underlying issues and formulating a plan of action that would effectively solve the problem for the long term, and not just a short-term "quick fix".

One of the first things discovered very quickly was that in order to be effective on a long-term basis, we could not focus on the issue by ourselves. Several agencies, people, and organizations were recruited, and helped us obtain our goal.

4. Assessment

Since the implementation of the ACT TEAM, in six months, the following results have been realized:

- The homeless population, fires, and assaults decreased 100%.
- Panhandling complaints, trespassing, and thefts decreased 90%.
- Indecent exposure and dog attacks decreased 98%,

One outcome linked to this project is officer's attitudes on Community Policing. Officers are very willing to talk to community members to find out what's broken so that they can be part of the process to fix it.



Irwindale Police Department ACT TEAM

Description and Detailed Presentation of ACT TEAM Project

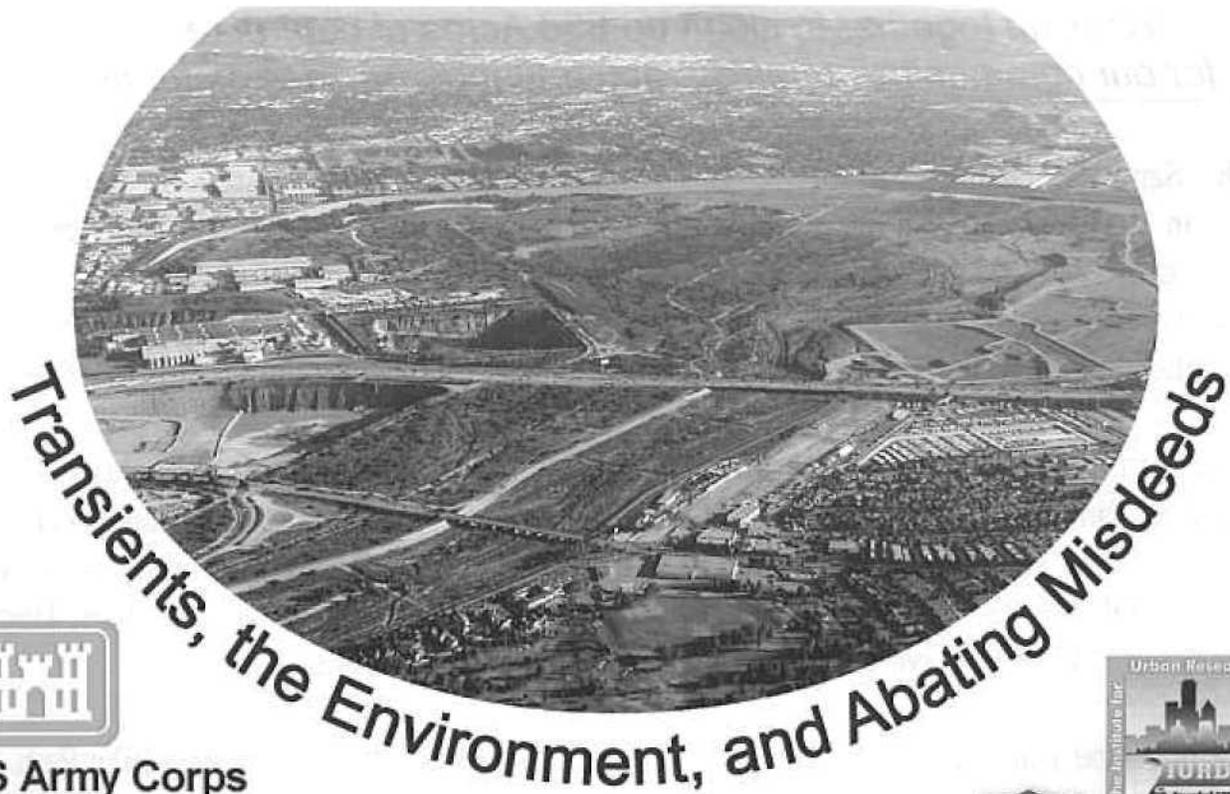


Irwindale Police Department

5050 N. Irwindale Avenue, Irwindale CA 91706 (626) 430-2244

ACT TEAM

Agencies Concerned Together for



**US Army Corps
of Engineers®**

Los Angeles District





Irwindale Police Department

5050 N. Irwindale Avenue, Irwindale CA 91706 (626) 430-2244

**Agencies who are Concerned, Together for the
Transients, the Environment, and Abating Misdeeds.**

ACT TEAM

*Working together to clean up 836 Acres of natural resource
for our communities to enjoy, and endangered species to thrive...*

The Santa Fe Dam is part of the Los Angeles County Drainage Area (LACDA) project. Started in 1941, and delayed by World War II until work resumed again in 1947, the project was completed in 1949. Of interest are die five distinct biological communities within the area. They represent the last vestige of a complex plant life system that was important to the Indians and early settlers. An ever-increasing transient population has been detrimental to this habitat.

Waste, filth, uncontrolled fires, drug use, vandalism, indecent exposure, and unlawful sex acts visible from family-used bike paths. Lack of solid inter-agency planning and action has changed a once beautifully natural environment into a dirty, unkempt haven for criminal activity, and environmental disaster. Several Police, Federal & State Agencies, Environmentalists, Homeless Advocates, and Citizens have worked jointly to effect a permanent change.

We welcome you to come enjoy the new Santa Fe Dam Recreational area and Bike Path.

*Irwindale Police Department
ACT TEAM COORDINATORS*

Sergeant John Fatone

Officer Luther Hitter

*5050 N. Irwindale Avenue
Irwindale, California 91706*

(626) 430-2244





Introduction

The families of Gregorro Fraijo and Fecundo Ayon first settled the Irwindale Community during the 1850¹s. The Children were many; generation after generation stayed on the land; and now there are seven generations of native Irwindale residents descended from the two families.

The land was a barren waste of rocks, sand and jackrabbits, but rocks later became a key asset to the area. Motorcars were becoming increasingly numerous in California, and the cry went up for improved roads, which, in turn, required vast quantities of crushed rock and gravel, In the 1950s the community became aware of the vast wealth from the rocks and sand - land their forefathers had thought no one would ever want. It has been estimated that over 70% of California's roads were made from material mined from Irwindale.

Neighboring cities saw the vast tax income that could be reaped and began to contemplate annexation. However, the industries saw the advantages of no city taxes, and the residents were weary of paying County taxes while receiving little or no improvements for their streets and the community as a whole. By incorporating, the city could have paved streets, curbs, and gutters, sidewalks, utility improvements, a recreation center, library, police department, swimming pool, and jobs for residents, and many advantages they had never had. On August 7, 1957, 9,5 square miles of land was incorporated becoming the City of Irwindale, the 56th city of Los Angeles County.

The Santa Fe Dam Recreation Area offers a 70-acre lake for sailing, swimming and fishing. The lake is stocked with bass, trout and catfish. Other features of the park include a popular children's water play area {open during summer}, picnic areas, trails for biking and hiking, and campsites (for youth groups). Electric boats, rowboats and paddleboats are available to rent, A tackle and bait shop is also located in the park. This project focuses primarily on the park and wilderness portions thereof with the city of Irwindale.





SCANNING

The Santa Fe Dam Recreational Area is situated relatively in the center of Irwindale. The Irwindale Police Department and the Los Angeles County Park Police primarily patrol the area. The park police are also responsible for patrolling several other County Park locations within Los Angeles County, and at times have extended responses to calls. Mostly this is due to the vast area covered by a low number of officers, which is further reduced when the parks are "closed" in evening hours.

Further exacerbating the problem is the jurisdictional boundaries of the city of Irwindale, which are contacted by seven cities, and eleven law enforcement jurisdictions. When a problem does arise, it sometimes becomes passed from one agency to another and never adequately addressed. Adding to this is the lack of cohesive communication ability between the agencies involved that creates confusion, delays, and safety issues.

There has always been a minor transient encampment "problem" in the area due to the remoteness and seclusion offered by natural vegetation and brush. It has been allowed to grow into a major encampment problem from lack of adequate resources and inconsistent enforcement efforts. The unchecked transients are known to be responsible for arson and accidental brush fires (as many as 28 in a 30-day period), local auto salvage yard thefts, illicit drug use, lewd conduct, and environmental endangerment on a major scale due to their encampments, and the refuse they create.



The public has increased complaints of lewd conduct, open drug use, semi-wild dogs (used as guard dogs at the transient encampments) attacking runners & bicyclists, and a general uneasiness in the area created by the transient population. The transient population in the area is the nature of the problem this project shall focus upon.

While assisting a Los Angeles County Park Police Officer in the area who was being attacked by a suspected arsonist, Irwindale Police Sergeant John Falone identified what he believed to be the fundamental factor inherent to the problems in the area. Due to the multi-jurisdictional



Irwindale Police Department

5050 N. Irwindale Avenue, Irwindale CA 91706 (626) 430-2244

boundaries and lack of consistent communication of those agencies, the transient/homeless population was allowed to thrive unchecked.

This particular problem was selected by Sgt. Falone to be addressed due to the large number of connected problems, and for safety issues related to local police officers, firemen, the public, and the environment.

After months of first-hand observations, several weeks of casual meetings with local police agencies, fire departments, the US Army Corps of Engineers, bike trail users, and citizens who go into and hike within the park, we have made the following observations:

- There is a high concentration of transient encampments and homeless within the area.
- Demands for services in the area were disproportionate to the "normal" rate,
- Unusually high concentration of crimes such as lewd conduct, public urination, drug activity, prostitution, arson, and disorderly conduct
- The same persons were continually contacted with no apparent change in behavior patterns, other than moving to another area within the park.
- Perimeter fences are cut and compromised to the point of being useless, or are easily bypassed. In one instance a young boy drowned after ignoring and bypassing several warning signs and fences, and then tried to swim in a spreading basin clearly marked "NO SWIMMING¹.
- Fire roads are overgrown and inadequate for current fire apparatus. This causes firefighters to haul in by foot fire hose and equipment creating great delay in fighting a fire they should be able to drive closer to.
- Broken glass, trash, and the indiscriminate cutting of indigenous trees & vegetation by transients to build shelter, causing the destruction of the natural habitat of federally protected species; one listed as endangered.



Of the problems discovered, the agreed upon priority list is as follows:

1. Repair of existing fire roads and adding minor access roads. The roads would need to be improved to allow better access by current fire apparatus to allow a quick response to brush fires, with the least possible disruption to the local fauna and flora.



2. Assist transient population in relocation, and obtaining help from recognized shelters, rescue missions, and homeless assistance programs. The main goal being assistance, not pushing our problems into another jurisdiction.
3. Clean up affected areas by removing trash and debris, repairing damage where possible, improving access trails, and carefully pruning vegetation in the area to promote re-growth. Clean up and pruning would also provide better visibility for law enforcement to prevent a future recurrence of transient encampments in the area.
4. Repair fencing and replace signage to prevent or deter access to restricted or protected areas within the area.
5. Continue checking area after initial goals are met to prevent the return of problems.

We knew that the goals would need to be kept simple and broad. The fire lanes need to be cleared and repaired; the transient population will be removed from the area and offered assistance if desired; the area will be cleaned of debris; and the conservation efforts to repair damaged areas would commence.

Several agencies have documented similar problems to the listed problems above, such as: LA County Park Police; LA County Fire; Irwindale Police; Azusa Police; LA County Sheriff; California Highway Patrol; El Monte Police; US Army Corps of Engineers. Most have been directly attributed to the local transient population. On site area checks have also confirmed unlawful weapons, semi-wild dogs, crude booby trap devices, trash, waste, and damaged flora.



ANALYSIS

To properly analyze the problem, we identified the events and conditions that precede and accompanied it. Homeless transients were staying in the area unlawfully overnight; conditions existed where they were able to avoid detection by moving from area to area; and the transients were concealing themselves in secluded areas. Conditions exist that allow the homeless to "reside" in the area without being disturbed. Heavily overgrown brush, inaccessible roads, and insecure perimeter fencing have allowed the homeless free access to secluded areas not regularly patrolled - or able to be patrolled.

To further analyze the problem, data from computer aided dispatch records was examined; surveys of persons using the area, bike path, hiking trails, and nature areas were interviewed; direct observation of the area by team agencies was made; and crime analysis was instigated.

In identifying the consequences of the problem for the community, we found them to be many. The water that traverses the area is channeled to spreading grounds just south of 1-210, on the east and west side of I-605 in the north area of the Santa Fe Dam. The water is then percolated directly into the local water table used by municipal wells for drinking and irrigation purposes. Several homeless encampments contained depositories of human waste, hazardous materials, and garbage that ran the risk of being swept into the riverbed during the high-water levels of fall release from Morris Reservoir. Further consequences involved one transient arsonist, believed to be responsible for a six month fire storm spree that - at its peak - caused twenty-eight brush fires in a thirty-day period. The air quality damages and destruction of the natural protected habitat of several federally protected species was tremendous. One expert estimated the recovery to the area might take several years. Civilians using the area have complained of observing lewd acts, solicitation for sex, open drug use, indecent exposure, semi-wild dog attacks, and rocks being thrown at vehicles.



In determining how frequently and how long the problem has occurred or has been taking place, we found the frequency of the problem to be daily. Since the homeless/transients live in the areas of concern, the problem exists continually as long as they "live" in the area. One homeless individual contacted has claimed to live in the Santa Fe Dam area for over 10 years. Others have



claimed to have lived inside the dam area for between a 'Tew weeks' to "several years". It is estimated that the problem has been taking place in one form or another for over 20 years or longer in one form or another The problem has become more serious in the past 3 to 5 years.

To narrow the scope of the problem as specifically as possible, we determined this problem is the unauthorized and illicit acts of homeless/transients living" in the area unchecked. It is from this that the other discovered problems are created, and flourish. The motivation for the homeless was established by interviews. They said they were "left alone" and "not hassled" by anyone in the area.



The analysis revealed Eo us that the problem was much more extensive than a single arsonist or just ^M"a few" homeless people. The problem effected several acres, and nearly 70 homeless individuals were contacted.

To better understand the problem, case workers from Project Achieve (a locally based homeless outreach center) responded to the area over the course of several weeks, during all hours of the day and night to contact and speak with the homeless. Based on their interviews and contacts a response was developed, planned, and put into action with input from the other ACT TEAM members.



3. Semi-wild dogs:

- a. Animal control
 - i. Catch,
 - ii. Trap,
 - iii. Tranquilize.
 - iv. Shoot if dangerously vicious,



4. Fire Department/Police Department concerns.

- a. Access to area(s)
- b. Containment issues (Re: fleeing/hiding suspect(s)).
- c. Controlled burn of area(s).
- d. Re-grade existing fire roads,
- e. Create new fire access roads.
- f. Patrol of area at night.

5. Securing location /Patrol efforts to eliminate future occurrences,

- a. Poor or inadequate fencing.
- b. Proper signage ("No Trespassing", etc.).
- c. Unsecured gates, inadequate perimeter fencing.
- d. Visibility into overgrown areas.
- e. Access into area as needed.

It was decided that the Homeless/Transient issue was a priority, as all other problems either stem from, or relate directly to them. Our intention was to first make every effort possible to assist them through local programs and facilities. Should voluntary compliance into specialty programs fail, our next goal was to use every legal tool possible to help them. In cases where "spirit of the law" may have been used previously, "letter of the law" was strictly enforced.

If it was legally and justifiably possible to have them committed for a 72-hour mental evaluation to get them cleaned up, medically attended to, medicated (if required), and helped, then it would be done. The belief was that any help - even if it had to be legally forced upon them - was better than no help at all. The main focus is to help them if we can, and not just push them into another jurisdiction to forget about them.



After taking care of the homeless and transients, the next concern would be the trash in and around their encampments, as well as any dangerous or infectious waste. The main concern here was to clean up the area so that it could recover as soon as possible back to a natural and flourishing state. Special equipment and certified hazardous waste crews were contacted to provide clean up, disposal, and to do so within a certain time frame,

Our next consideration was the Fire Department's request to have better access to the area to combat brush fires. Roads were either overgrown, impassable, or did not exist. Incorporated into the clean up phase, this was relatively easy to accomplish. Police Department access to area(s) was also addressed at the same time as fire roads were created or improved.



Perhaps the most difficult situation is the securing of the location. The first problem is the sheer size of the perimeter fence. Spanning several miles, the fence was cut in the past sometimes only



hours after being repaired. This is expected to be solved by having all brush cleared from the fences to make observation and repair of the fence quicker and more consistent. It is expected that continued patrol and enforcement will maintain the area once cleaned out.

The project coordinator will be Sgt. John A. FaLone of the Irwindale Police Department (626) 430-2244 x413. Each sector will have a primary responsible party as well, which is to be assigned at the monthly meetings. The

main response plan for all sections will be:

- Identify that a violation of law has occurred (trespassing, etc.).
- Contact and identify the homeless/transient in violation of the law.
- Arrest/cite/advise as appropriate.
- Offer assistance via "Project Achieve" or similar homeless service company.
- Advise homeless not to return to area or face further charges/arrest.
- Identify and secure access point used.
- Contact responsible property owner (US Army Corps or LA Co Flood Control).
- Clean up - if required.
- Extra patrol of area to curtail homeless/transient return.



Our team decided to maintain specific goals for the response plan which are:

- 1: Assist the homeless / transients in obtaining help,
2. Maintain the area in a natural state.
3. Protect the environment and wildlife.
4. Keep the area secured to prevent dangerous situations.
5. Maintain patrol and protection of the area.

The relevant data we will be collecting will be:

* Homeless people count (total).

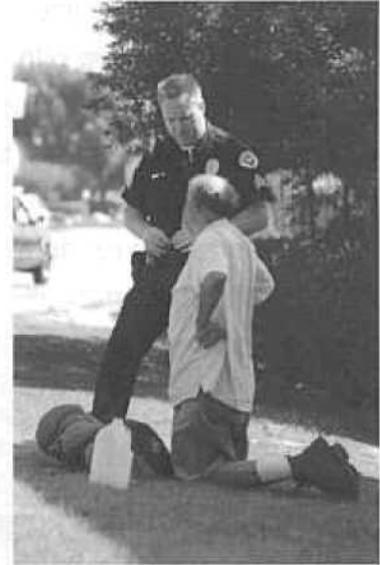
- How many were helped or declined help.
- How many were arrested,

* Environmental impact.

- How the area is recovering.
- Has the endangered species population decreased or increased.
- Is the area recovering or declining.
- Have arson fires decreased or increased,

* Crime impact.

- Have property crimes in the area changed.
- Have crimes against the person changed.





ASSESSMENT

The plan was implemented with great success. Agencies worked together to achieve the goal of cleaning out the area for fire access, removing all homeless encampments, protecting the environment, and obtaining help for the homeless who desired help.

The total homeless count for homeless persons contacted in 2003 was 69. Most of the homeless contacted were "passing through" and moved on to other locations. In the initial focus area, twenty homeless persons were contacted. Eight homeless persons accepted help, and ten declined help, deciding instead to "move on" somewhere else. Two were arrested, one for a felony no-bail parole hold out of Northern California, another for attempted arson.



The area is recovering very well, and is expected to continue to do so. The encampments have been cleaned out completely, and shrubbery pruned for growth. It appears that new growth is increasing, but more time is needed to fully assess this aspect.

The endangered species population seems to have increased, or is more visible in the area without being frightened away by homeless encampments. An accurate count will not be realized until later this year during nesting seasons.

Arson fires decreased by over 98%, as there have been no arson fires reported since a homeless man was arrested at the scene of an arson fire for attempted arson. This individual was also charged with the assault of a Los Angeles County Park Police Officer - the same officer being attacked that Sgt John Falone initially responded to assist which started this project in motion.



Property crimes in the area have declined from past years, as well as vandalism, objects being thrown at vehicles, and petty thefts. Crimes against the person have also declined, including panhandling complaints; exposure/lewd conduct issues; drunk in public violations; man down calls; fights; and assaults. Park officials have reported a higher use of trails and bike paths, and a nature center has been remodeled recently for public environmental awareness and conservation education as well.

The degree of impact this response plan has had on this problem has been tremendous:

- The homeless population, fires, and assaults decreased 100%.
- Panhandling complaints, trespassing, and thefts decreased 90%.
- Indecent exposure and dog attacks decreased 98%.

The methods of evaluation were comparison before and after based on calls for service, CAD calls history, RMS, and direct observation. All agencies and persons involved in the ACT TEAM were involved in the evaluation which is still being evaluated for effectiveness currently. The only problems encountered in implementing the response plan was crude booby-trap devices, the semi-wild dogs, the difficult terrain, and combative homeless persons.

All of our response goals were met, and most were exceeded. Measuring calls for service, complaints, and observations before and after implementation indicate a complete success of our goals. We determined that our team needs to identify new strategies to augment original plan on a continual basis to maintain effectiveness. More active patrol by all concerned agency teams in areas of responsibility is needed to keep the problem from recurring. Damaged fences and gates need to be addressed and repaired immediately to deter homeless encampment return, and discourage breaching of the fence.

Our team will need to conduct ongoing assessment to ensure continued effectiveness. The area is currently being monitored to ensure continued effectiveness, and continues to improve. The program in the focus area is a complete success, and plans are in the process to increase the focus area to a citywide application for our 2004-05 fiscal year.



Irwindale Police Department ACT TEAM

Agency and Officer Information



Irwindale Police Department

5050 N. Irwindale Avenue, Irwindale CA 91706 (626) 430-2244

Agency and Officer **Information:**

1. The entire department has adopted this problem solving initiative. Several officers have started the SARA model process for other area concerns such as illegal dumping, graffiti, and street racing.
2. **Sgt**, Falcne attended the Police Executive Research Forum's POP Conference in San Diego in 2003, prior to starting the ACT TEAM.
3. No additional incentives were given to officers engaged in problem solving other than overtime if worked, and the satisfaction of completing the task successfully,
- A. **Sgt** Falone used the COPS guidebook: "Problem-Solving Tips - A Guide to Reducing Crime and Disorder through Problem-Solving Partnerships" and methods learned from the San Diego conference he attended.
5. The issues identified were: Homeless Persons; Transients; illegal Dumping; Arson; Environmental Impact; Lewd Conduct; Prostitution; Assault; Animal Control; Trespassing; and Theft.
6. Resources committed were officers attention during normal patrol duties, scheduled meetings during working hours, coordination of other agencies resources (OS Army Corps of Engineers - Heavy Lquipment for example).
7. Project Contact Person:
 - a. John l'alone
 - b. Police Sergeant
 - c. 5050 R frwindalc Avenue,
 - d. Irwindale, California 91706
 - e. (626)430-2244 (Voice mail x413)
 - f. (626) S56-0471 Fax
 - g. JFalcme@ci.i[-%vindale.ca.us - or- Sergcantf'alone@Verizon.net

Our sincere thanks and appreciation to the Goldstein **Award** Selection Committee, and the Center for Problem Oriented Policing for your consideration of the ACT TEAM's project.

Sergeant John Falone
Irwindale Police Department



Irwindale Police Department ACT TEAM

ACT TEAM Photographs

Irwindale Police Department ACT TEAM Photographs



Overview – aerial photograph of Phase 1 focus area



Main Encampment – Animal Control Officer checking area for semi-wild dogs used as sentry/guard dogs by transients.



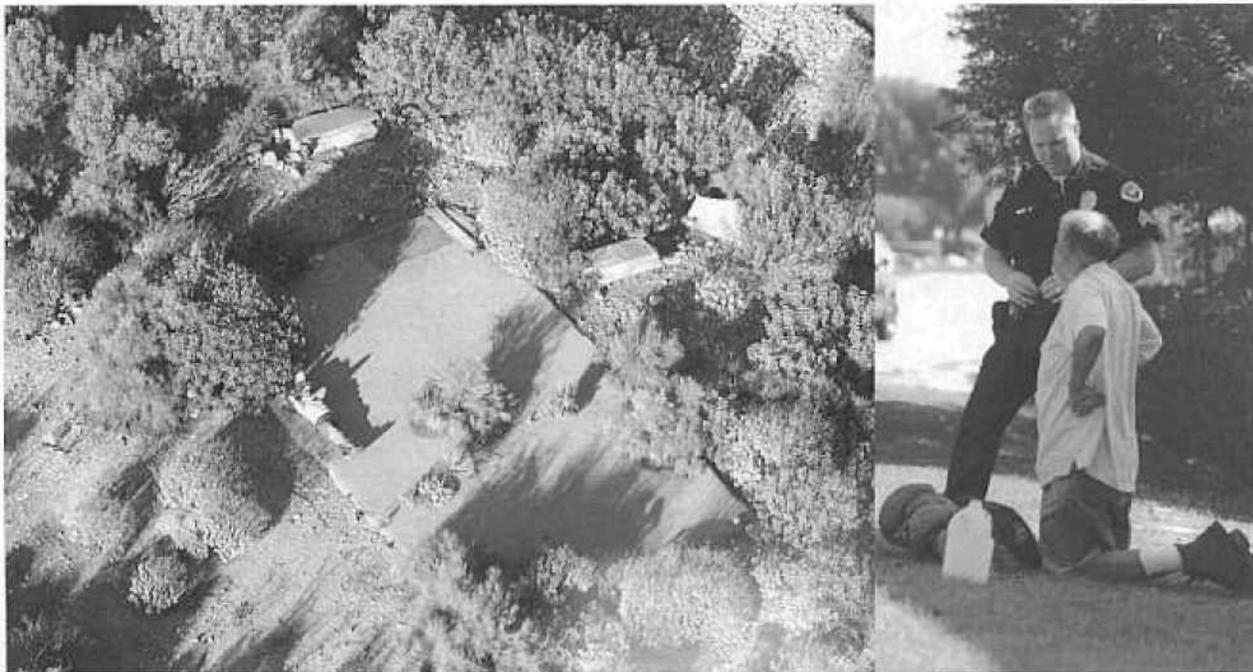
Burn Damage – aerial photograph of burn area (one of several) within Phase 1 area



Burn Damage – photograph of burn area (one of several) within Phase 1 area, shown from ground level



Hidden Camp – encampment hidden under brush in Phase 1 focus area



Homeless Camp – encampment in Phase 1 focus area, where homeless subject is sleeping. Later contacted by Sgt. Falone



Trash Camp – Trash near encampment hidden under brush in Phase 1 focus area. Trash is visible on left edge



Trash Camp – Sgt. Falone and Ofc. Ritter discuss options during clean up phase in focus area trash camp.



Trash Camp – Close-up of some trash near encampment hidden under brush in Phase 1 focus area.

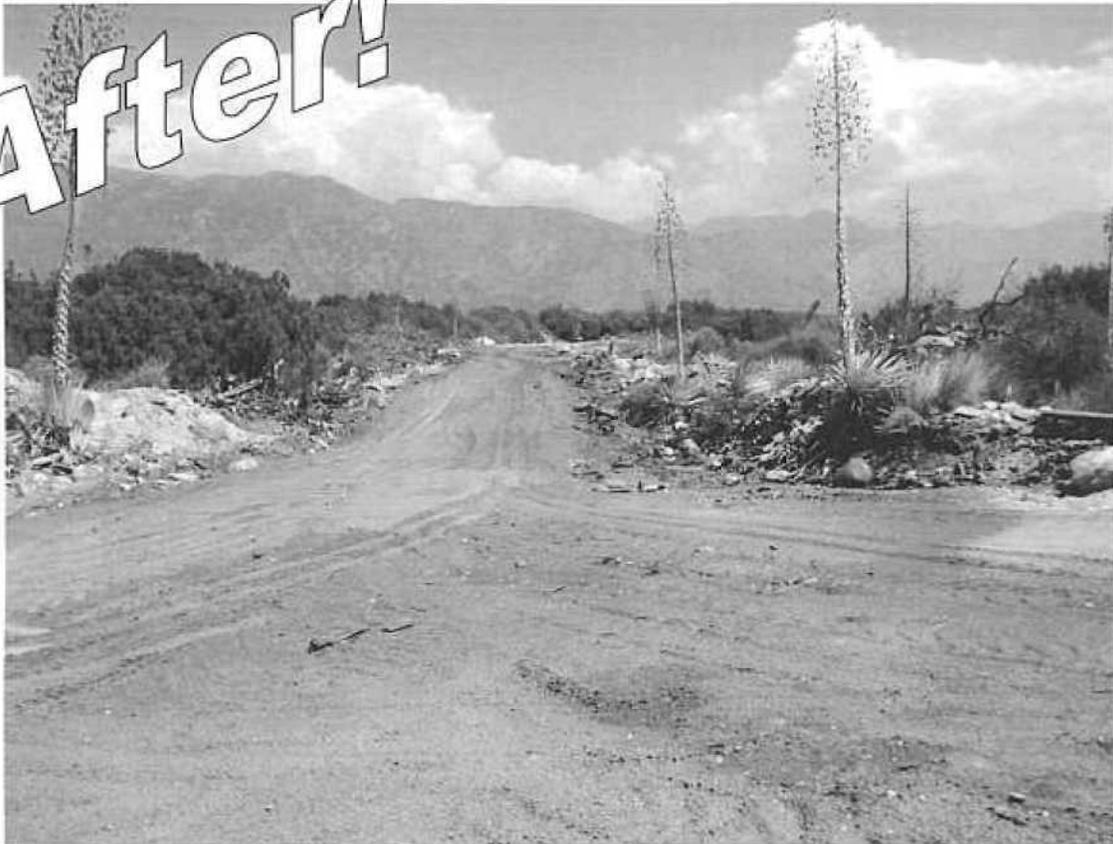


The terrain was difficult at best to traverse, making clean up and homeless contacts difficult at best.

Before...



After!



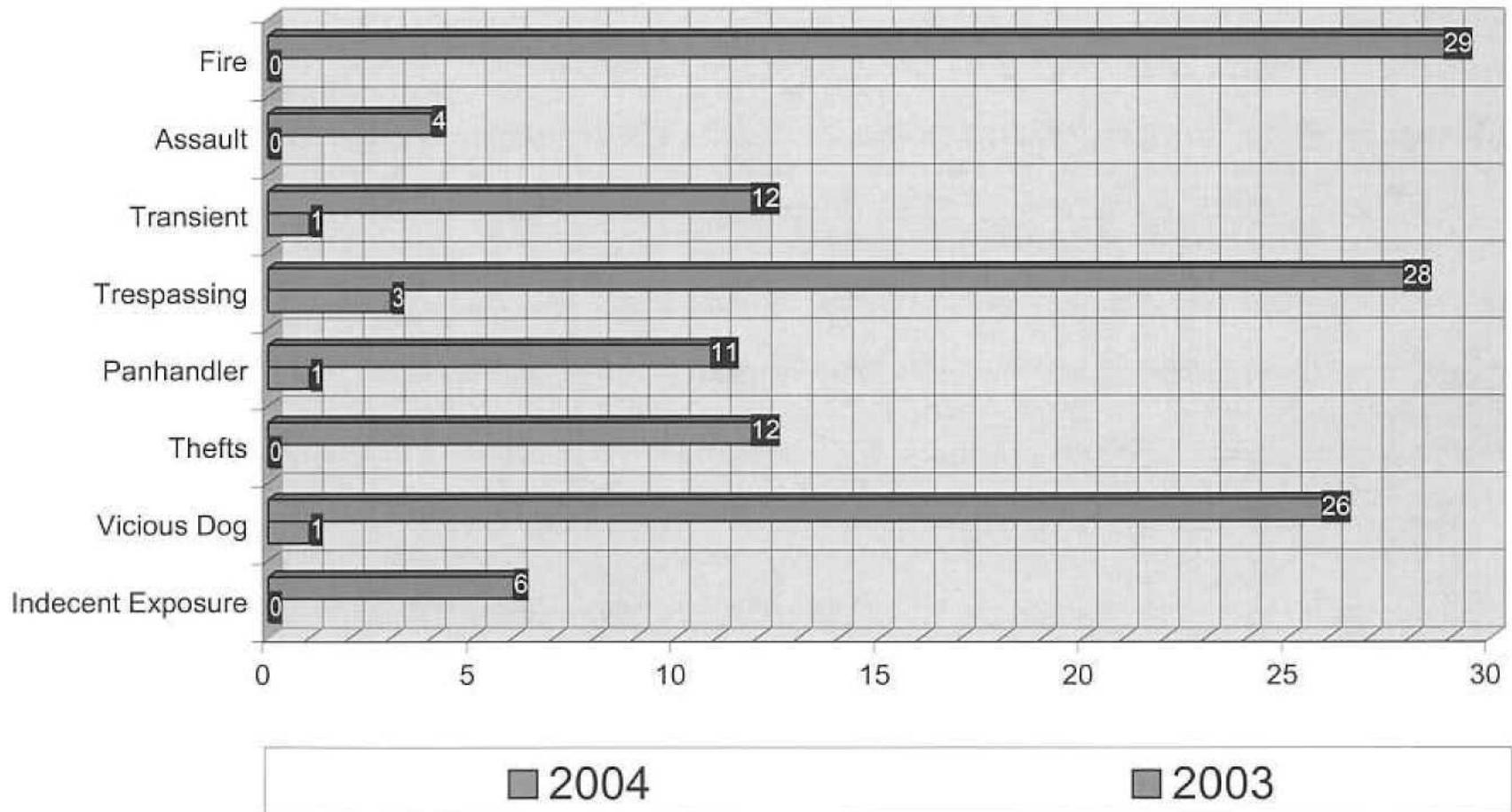


Irwindale Police Department ACT TEAM

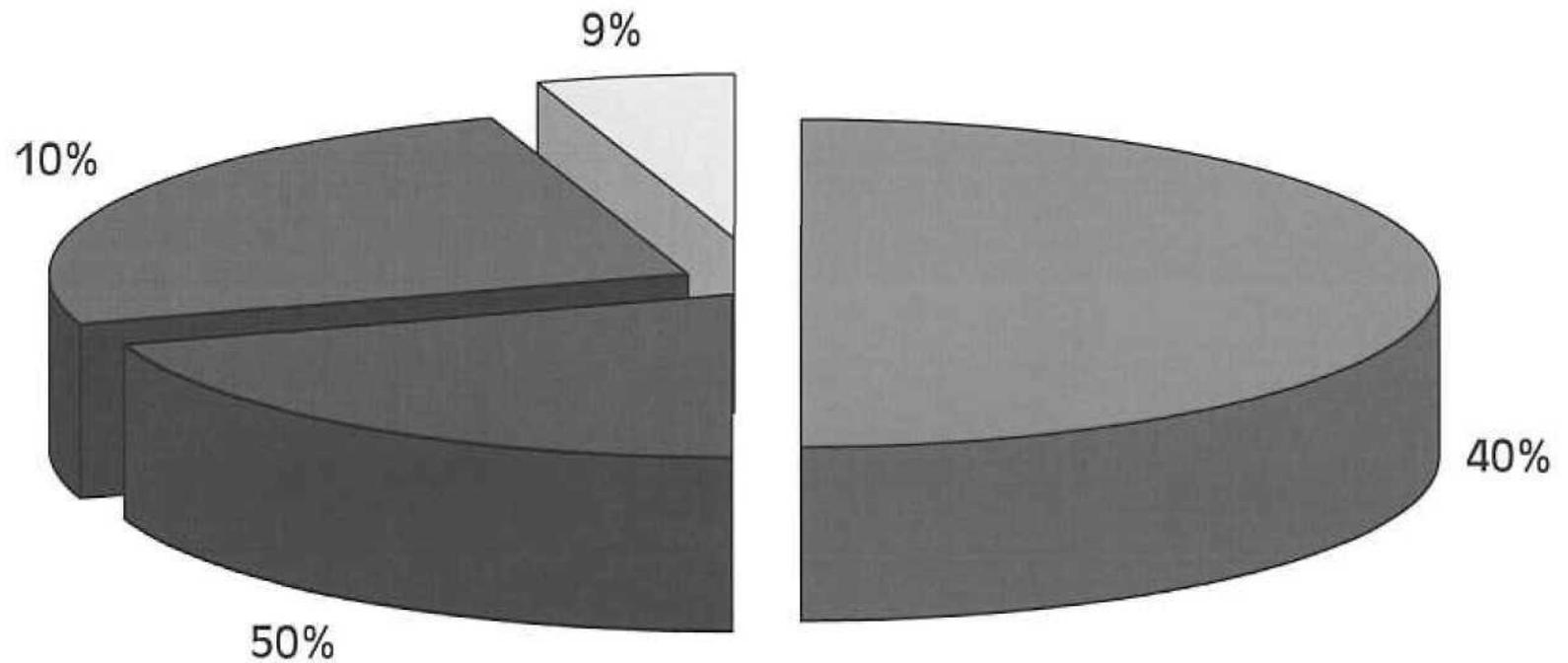
Calls for Service Chart
ACT TEAM Homeless Detail Chart

6 & 7

Calls For Service 2003-2004 ACT TEAM



ACT TEAM - Homeless Dispositions





Irwindale Police Department ACT TEAM

Newspaper Articles

San Gabriel Valley Tribune - Teenager Drowns in Pond

San Gabriel Valley Tribune - Coalition Aids Homeless

San Gabriel Valley Tribune - East Valley Needs Homeless Help

US Army Corps of Engineers - Base Crews Work With Cops



San Gabriel Valley Tribune (West Covina, CA)

May 19, 2003
Section: News

Teenager drowns in pond

Marianne Love Staff Writer

IRWINDALE -- The body of a 15-year-old boy was dragged from the bottom of the Santa Fe Flood Control Basin on Sunday afternoon, two hours after his younger brother saw him desperately paddling for his life 60 feet from shore, authorities said.

Alex Alba of South Los Angeles, his 13-year-old brother and four friends were bodyboarding in an area of the basin that is closed to the public, but has easy access from nearby bike trails. "At some point he lost his flotation device, and his brother saw him doggy paddling. Obviously, he was not a good swimmer," said Inspector Edward Osorio of the Los Angeles Fire Department.

A blue board, swim trunks and water shoes were found close by, said Sgt. John Falone of the Irwindale Police Department. County police were investigating a car illegally parked when they learned about the accident, Sgt. Alan Pucciarelli said. "The boy ran to the officers and led them to the location. Lake lifeguards searched the water for 10 minutes," Pucciarelli said.

Authorities received a 9-1-1 call around 4:11 p.m. They arrived on scene at 4:33 p.m., when divers began their search, Osorio said. Osorio said it took the fire department about 20 minutes to reach the area due to a miscommunication regarding the exact location and the rugged terrain and distance in the spreading grounds. About 35 people were part of the rescue attempt, including county fire and police departments and local police and sheriff's deputies.

The dive team, which searched the water in two teams of four divers, consisted of county lifeguards from the Fire Department. The group of boys, ages 13 to 16, first went to the adjacent Santa Fe Dam Recreation Area to swim. But, the lake was closed. Its official season is from Memorial Day to Labor Day weekends, authorities said. That's when the teens headed for the spreading ground basins just south of the FoolhiH (210) Freeway at the San Gabriel River (505) Freeway, said Sgt. Michael Mosca of the county police. Two weeks ago, the basin was bone dry, said Soo T. Khoo, a civil engineering technician with the county's Public Works Department, who was called to the scene.

Spreading basins are at different levels, which allows water to flow from a higher basin to a lower basin. It was the area between the basins. A concrete hill at about a 45-degree angle, where the victim allegedly was sliding from one basin to the other. "I guess they were using the overflow channel as a water slide," said John Lenihan, a battalion chief with the county Fire Department. Lenihan said the basin was about 12 feet deep, the water temperature about 50 degrees and the visibility from 3 to 5 feet. Family members, who gathered at the dam's administration office, declined to comment. Sgt. Richard Brededa of the Irwindale Police Department said it's unusual to have drownings in the catch basins, but with gravel pits and other bodies of water in the community, "It does happen."

- Marianne Love can be reached at (626) 962-3811, Ext. 2707, or by e-mail at marianne.l@sgvtribune.com.



San Gabriel Valley Tribune (West Covina, CA)

September 3, 2003

Section: News

*Coalition aids homeless in dam area.
Encampment is cleared to create fire access lane.*

Jason Kosareff, Staff Writer

IRWINDALE - Police are sweeping the homeless out of the Santa Fe Dam Recreational Area, but not sweeping them under the rug. What started out as a plan to make the dam and surrounding brushy areas more accessible to firefighters ended up as Irwindale police Sgt. John Falone's crusade to rescue about a dozen homeless people from life on the street. "This is the first time we've actively gone and tried to do something solely for their benefit," Falone said.

The homeless are blamed for brush fires at least 28 in July and August as well as vandalism, burglaries, drug use and mounds of trash up to three feet deep around their encampments. But they are also people in need of help, Falone said.

Because so many agencies have an interest in the dam, Falone has come up against obstacles at every turn. So far, he has brought in 19 public and private agencies - including Agencies Concerned Together for Transients, the Environment and Abating Misdeeds or ACT TEAM - to help with the problem.

After a month of planning, Falone's effort paid off last week when the team successfully cleaned out the largest encampment south of the Foothill (21D) Freeway and created miles of passable tracks that firefighters can use to access the area. So far, two of the estimated dozen homeless people who live in the dam have been voluntarily brought to the homeless rehabilitation program Project ACHIEVE in El Monte.

While the Army Corps of Engineers, Caltrans, Vulcan Materials Corp., Los Angeles County Fire Department, Azusa police, local environmentalists and others are combining forces to clean up the area, one problem has been almost impossible to overcome: the reservoir dogs. The homeless in the dam own several dogs and are not willing to part with them. Richard Kay has lived in the dam area for 10 years. He has 15 dogs and worries what would happen to them if he left. "The dogs have been an obstacle we're trying to get around to help them," said Rudy Salinas, a street outreach worker with Project ACHIEVE. Falone told Kay he could keep one dog, Spirit. The other dogs might be able to go to a rescue group instead of being exterminated, Falone said. Project ACHIEVE would give the homeless a temporary address so they can get a license for their pets and Falone is working with county animal control to get the pets spayed and neutered. He is also willing to donate collars and leashes, he said. "Their only companionship is the stray dogs they collect," Falone said.

While the ACT TEAM does almost-daily sweeps through encampments in the southern area of the dam, the homeless move north toward the mountains. But Falone said they will eventually run out of room and have to either get help or move out of the area. Falone plans to complete the project by November.

Jason Kosareff can be reached at (714) 962-0811, Ext. 2717, or by e-mail jason.kosareff@mswn.com.

© 2003 San Gabriel Valley Tribune. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission of NewsBank, Inc. is prohibited.



San Gabriel Valley Tribune (West Covina, CA)

September 15, 2003

Section: Opinion

East Valley needs homeless help

When we heard about a sweep of horseless people from the Santa Fe Dam area, we thought it was necessary. However, the sweep was more than a must. Rather, the roundup attempted to provide men and women a place to stay. The sweep began as a brush-clearing operation to allow firefighters access to the dam and surrounding brush-choked areas. But Irwindale police Sgt. John Falone got involved in the effort to relocate about a dozen people who have called the dam area home, some evidently as long as 10 years.

Thanks to Falone, a few willing to try may find permanent homes and life beyond the trash piles and gritty encampments through a local rehabilitation program. Sadly, the remainder weren't ready to trust El Monte's Project ACHIEVE and will simply move on, likely north, setting up makeshift neighborhoods at the base of the San Gabriete. This is an unacceptable situation.

The potential for devastating fires in (he foothills is multiplied when transients set up housekeeping with camp Fires. The 1993 Altadena firestorm that charred 5,700 acres and torched 157 homes, started from an unattended campfire sel by a drifter. Authorities blame the homeless for 26 brush fires in July and August, as well as burglaries, drug use and mounds of trash in county parks and alongside l he San Gabriel River. It may seem cruel but these occasional sweeps are necessary to not only the well-being of the homeless who endanger themselves under such conditions, but also those in adjacent residential areas who suffer the brunt of property loss through fire and burglaries.

Clearly, the east end of the county must mirror the successful eFForts of overnight shelters in Pasadena and Whittier. The East San Gabriel Valley Consortium on Homeless is working toward a centralized shelter and has had some success in convincing member cities to provide transitional housing for homeless families. Covina has responded with plans to build a small apartment complex with several units set aside for the homeless. More cities need to follow Covina's lead. With more lhan 11.000 homeless in the area, homeless ness is becoming a problem too targe for only small-scale solutions. A centrally located shelter must he created and the sooner the belter.

(c) 2003 San Getrier Veltrey Tribune. AH rights reserved. fteyrottuMd wfri !he psffniuJgn o/Mecte N&mGioup, tee. fty fitemBgnk, Inc.



EL MONTE BASEYARD CREWS WORK WITH COPS AND AID AGENCIES TO HELP HOMELESS MOVED FROM SANTA FE DAM BASIN

by Mike Tharp

From leveraging a bulldozer blade to steering a radio-equipped government jeep, Tony Masoe knows the lay of the land at Santa Fe Dam Basin.

The onetime heavy crane operator at the Seal Beach Naval Weapons Station is now the District's maintenance supervisor at the flood control basin east of downtown Los Angeles. So when Irwindale police began telling him of problems at homeless encampments on Corps land—fires, vandalism, drug use—the 34-year agency veteran knew what to do. He'd seen the heavily vegetated alluvial plain from the cactus-studded ground up, so he set his first priority as creating access to the area for cops and firefighters.

Masoe dispatched team members from the EL Monte Base yard and several Corps contractors to the roughly 40-acre site. Under Masoe's supervision, they manned graders, bulldozers and trucks, bisecting the area with dirt roads wide enough to accommodate fire and police vehicles. "We blazed roads all around the compound," he said, "The fire department had been putting out a lot of fires, and bikers and recreationists were being chased by dogs. One thing led to another."

The District employees also posted signs all along the cyclone fence surrounding the property:

"You are camped on Corps land in an unauthorized area. This site will be cleaned up. You should take all your personal belongings from this area or they will be considered trash and hauled away beginning on Monday, 25 August 2003."

The posters' audience was at least a dozen homeless people and their dogs who, over the years, had gradually usurped the land. Although Masoe-himself a Vietnam combat veteran—and other District team members were personally sympathetic to the plight of some of the homeless, some of whom were vets themselves, they knew they had to follow the law. And the law said the people in the basin were trespassing on government property in a flood control zone.

But on the 25th, when authorities swept in to clean up the area, the quality of mercy wasn't strained. Where some may have seen only a scourge to be uprooted, Irwindale Police Sgt. John Falone saw an opportunity. The officer called in 19 public and private agencies, according to the San Gabriel Valley Tribune, to offer help to the men and women being removed from the dam basin. "This is the first time we've actively gone and tried to do something solely for their benefit," he told the newspaper.

One of the assisting agencies was Project Achieve, an El Monte adjunct of the Institute for Urban Research and Development. A month before the cleanup date, Sgt. Falone asked Project Achieve for help in relocating and rehabbing the homeless. The police and city officials hoped "that we could provide aid to these individuals rather than see them be arrested," said Rudy Salinas, a street outreach case manager for Project Achieve.

Salinas and others met eight of the homeless people and, so far, have succeeded in getting substantial help to two of them. One man in his late 30s or early 40s is now receiving regular services from the agency, and another man has received medical assistance. Salinas stressed that the project isn't a shelter. "We try to begin the process to get them out of the homeless cycle," he said.

Meanwhile Masoe and his District colleagues still have a big cleanup job to finish. Using both Corps people and the contract workers, they've been bulldozing mounds of trash and garbage, dumping them into trucks and trash bins and hauling them away. They've policed up needles and other drug paraphernalia, plastic bags, empty butane tanks, tin cans, shopping carts, backpacks, human and animal feces—even a kitchen sink. "Very unsanitary conditions," Masoe said recently as he drove his jeep over the rugged trail. "We've been separating debris from green waste, and right now it's 100% improvement over what used to be." He estimates the cleanup is about halfway finished.

It's still unclear why the transients picked Santa Fe Dam Basin for their hideout. Salinas of Project Achieve has his own theories: "We've noticed severe mental illness in some of them, and drug use is quite rampant—meth (amphetamines), mainly. For the most part, they try to make as few connections as possible with society. They scrape together cans to recycle to pay for food, drink or drugs."

Even as the cleanup winds down, there's some concern some of the homeless will try to return. "That's their home," Salinas said. "They have difficulty leaving the area. We are here to present an option for them. It may not be the best option, but it's one option."

And just as Project Achieve works to fulfill its mission, so does Masoe work at one of the Corps' environmental missions. Pointing to a wizened California manzanita tree among the hundreds of Lemon berry trees, he said, "That's the only one here. I tell 'em (the crews) they can cut down some of the others, but that one stays."

USACB, LA District Address:

*915 Wilshire Blvd. Suite 980
Los Angeles, CA 90017*