



Problem Solving Quarterly

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A newsletter of the Police Executive Research Forum.
Reporting on innovations in problem-oriented policing.

'Think Before You Drink' A Response to Alcohol Misuse

by Syrilyn Tong

College campuses are known for wild drinking parties and abuses of alcohol. The State of Alaska appears to be particularly vulnerable to alcohol misuse, perhaps due to the long hours of darkness and extreme cold. The University of Alaska Fairbanks is the largest residential campus in the state and therefore has the highest concentration of young adults in Alaska. When this is coupled with resident students who are usually away from parents and relatives for the first time in their life, alcohol abuse runs rampant. Countless police and residence life hours every year are spent attempting to thwart alcohol abuse and solve other related problems.

The University of Alaska Fairbanks Police Department began scanning police reports and administrative disciplinary reports to glean the nature of the problem. The department then concentrated their study on quality of life issues affecting resident students, because to tackle the entire subject of alcohol abuse would have been unmanageable. The analysis of the problem consisted of a behavioral survey to determine drinking behavior, levels of tolerance and self-reported levels of drinking. Additionally the department established a base-line frequency of offenses, to include who, where and when they were most often occurring. Using these statistics, we focused our attention on the most problematic places, times and days of the week.

The "Think Before you Drink" Project was the response to the problem. It consisted of late weekend night activities set in the most problematic residence halls. This plan of attack was chosen as it combined a targeted focus with alternatives to drinking.

As a result of the combined community efforts, the number of alcohol related incidents decreased 25 percent, repeat offenders decreased by 84.6 percent, underage drinking decreased by 47 percent, and officer hours spent on the problem decreased by 23 percent. Additionally, a measurement of the quality of life indicated a 64 percent decrease in persons negatively affected by the byproducts of alcohol abuse. Consequently, alcohol incidents today still reflect a similar decrease in frequency.

Scanning: Why Alcohol Abuse?

Although the University of Alaska Fairbanks covers only five square miles, it houses the largest concentration of under 21-year olds in Alaska. Members of the University Police Department knew instinctively that alcohol related disturbances were the single most prevalent problem facing the University. Countless hours were spent dealing with different facets of the problem, and different enforcement and prevention methods had been tried, having little or no effect. Up to this point, however, no one had ever determined exactly how large of a problem

alcohol abuse was. More importantly, there had never been any attempt to systematically address the problem..

With the advent of problem-oriented policing, and a generous grant from the U.S. Justice Department, the decided to "crunch the numbers" and discover the extent of the problem. In comparison studies with five universities similar in size or rural location in the Western United States, UAF had 4.5 times as many liquor law violations as the five school average. The definition of alcohol abuse was then discussed. At UAF, alcohol related incidents involved individuals driving while intoxicated, minors drinking illegally, sexual assaults, domestic violence situations and alcohol related disturbances which included fighting, disturbing the peace and vandalism. Drug abuse was oftentimes linked to alcohol, and regularly the crime affected no one other than the drunken individual (at least on the surface).

Because alcohol abuse was so immense, they had to narrow the field. For the purpose of this study, they decided to focus their efforts on the areas that most affected the resident students' quality of life. The department thus focused entirely on the residence halls, excluding driving related alcohol incidents, unless they occurred directly adjacent to residence halls and affected the quality of life of students residing there; also excluded were campus pub and any drug related issues.

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Before any new efforts aimed at combating the problem, or even analyzing the problem, the department examined past practices and reasons why they may not have worked. On the campus, alcohol education and prevention fell to one man at the Center for Health and Counseling. He was employed part-time and most of his time was taken up with intervention education after the fact (once referred by police or residence life staff). There were several other programs intended to educate and inform before students chose to drink. These programs consisted of giving lectures to students when called upon as a substitute teacher, giving orientation presentations at the beginning of the fall semester and a program called "Food for Thought" (free food giveaways in exchange for answering a question on alcohol or drug abuse). Each of these programs was presented at the leisure of the presenters, i.e.: on weekdays, when students were least likely to drink and near the student center, not at students' place of residence. The timing and location was an important fact that helped form the basis of the later response.

A discussion of the geography and environment at UAF is also imperative to understand the later response. The main confines of the University are entirely separated from the surrounding community. There is a single fraternity on campus, which houses nine residents. There are no sorority houses. The major sports teams are hockey and basketball, both wintertime sports, which, because of the harsh winter climate at UAF, do not lend themselves to tailgating parties or large outdoor gatherings. The majority of alcohol related problems at other campuses across the nation are related to the "greek" system (fraternities and sororities) and/or tailgating at football games or shortly thereafter. Because the physical and environmental structure at UAF is not conducive to these two types of activities, the department did not have to contend with these two issues.

Analyzing the Data

The department began its analysis by looking at past police reports, logged activ-

ities and a previous survey of UAF students' drinking behaviors. In calendar year 1996, 66 percent of all non-property type crimes were alcohol related, while 1997 figures indicate that 72 percent of non-property crimes were alcohol related. Informal talks with students and resident advisors residing in the halls indicated that they were annoyed by various problems directly related to alcohol abuse. These annoyances ranged from noise, sick roommates, vomit, urine and blood in common areas, and vandalized hallways and elevators. Additionally each time a physical incident occurred, which could not be connected to a known individual, all members of the residence hall then bore the financial responsibility for cleaning or fixing the problem.

At the start of the spring 1998 semester, members of the department knew they had to gather current data on the problem, beginning with data taken before any measures were put into effect. They devised a two-pronged approach: the actual analysis of incidents reported to the police and a behavioral survey given to resident students both before and after any responses to the problem. In analyzing the incidents reported to the police, they specifically wanted to find out who was responsible, who *were* the victims, when incidents occurred, and where they occurred. Forty alcohol related incidents occurring in or near the residence halls were reported to the police during the control semester. A case-by-case analysis of the 40 incidents revealed the following:

65 percent of incidents were caused by males;

65 percent of incidents occurred on Friday or Saturday nights;

72 percent of incidents which occurred on Friday or Saturday night occurred after 11 p.m.;

77 percent of incidents involved persons under the legal drinking age;

58 percent of incidents occurred in two residence hall areas.

Regarding this analysis, 40 incidents

were reported to the police department, 116.25 police hours were spent on alcohol-related issues, 17 underage drinking incidents occurred and there were 10 repeat offenders. Due to miscommunication regarding what type of statistics were needed from the Office of Residence Life, the department could not determine how many offenses were reported to them. Finally, there was difficulty interpreting portions of the survey results, thus specific student perceptions were impossible to measure.

The second prong to the approach, an alcohol usage survey, was designed and administered by civilian members of the department. More than 200 Resident students were queried as to their perceptions and usage of alcohol. Some of the more interesting results of that survey follow:

40 percent of students drank more since coming to UAF;

85 percent believed alcohol was either very accessible or accessible to underage students;

75 percent attended parties where alcohol was served, however food was hardly ever present;

22 percent reported themselves as "regular" drinkers (drank 3 or more times per week);

63 percent stated that they did not have a problem controlling their drinking;

68 percent reported binge drinking (having five or more drinks in a row) at least once during the past month;

61 percent stated that they had not been negatively impacted by an alcohol related disturbance while at UAF.

Based upon the above information, it could be interpreted that most respondents drank less than three times per week, but when they did drink, it was "to excess." Furthermore, these same drinkers did not see this as a problem. Additionally, a slight majority did not feel negatively impacted

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by any alcohol-related problems, while food was almost never available at parties where alcohol was served.

Responding to the Problem

The department determined that the majority of drinking (both heavy and otherwise) occurred on Friday and Saturday nights, after 11 p.m. They consisted mostly of underage males in two complexes. At this point, the department sifted through other campus' alcohol education/prevention efforts and did not see any programs that were especially promising.

The department was at a loss as to how to proceed when it looked back at past campus efforts and current practices and began to ask: "why?" Why were underage males so different than other population groups? Why were the most problematic areas centered within two specific residence halls? Why had past efforts failed? It was here that the department reached the conclusion: past efforts had not been particularly effective because they were not timed to when and where the majority of problem students drank (i.e. Friday and Saturday nights after 11 p.m.).

Once determining this somewhat obvious conclusion, the department formed a hypothesis: If you focus your prevention/education efforts at the time and place just before most students drink, the number of alcohol related problems will decrease. Despite the fact that most alcohol related incidents were caused by underage male students, it was decided to test the hypothesis with the education of all students in the residence halls. The department used the first full weekend of the fall 1998 semester as a testing grounds. This weekend was traditionally one of the busiest weekends of the fall semester with regard to alcohol related problems.

Thus, on Friday and Saturday night of the first weekend of school, three police department personnel were stationed in the lobby of one of the most troubled residence halls, passing out literature relating to illegal underage drinking and possible criminal and administrative ramifications

of such usage. It was considered a success in that many students who were otherwise unaware of underage drinking laws were educated about them. More importantly, the number of alcohol related disturbances within the residence halls on this weekend (0 incidents) was far less than opening weekend of fall 1997 (three incidents).

Encouraged, but not entirely won over by this initial achievement, the department wondered if the hypothesis could be further confirmed. The experiment was repeated on the weekend of September 25-27, which is considered the biggest weekend of the fall semester. This particular weekend is similar to other university's homecoming weekends in that a large dance, bonfire and other special activities are planned. It is generally one of the last weekends before winter sets in. It was decided to expand upon the "Food for Thought" concept by passing out alcohol-related questionnaires and asking an alcohol related question in exchange for a free piece of pizza and a soda. We felt that if students still chose to drink, an added benefit of the "Food for Thought" program was that they wouldn't be drinking on an empty stomach.

This experiment appeared to be successful in that the number of underage drinking offenses was down 62 percent from the previous year (eight in 1997, three in 1998); even though the number of alcohol related disturbances stayed the same (five incidents). Furthermore, an estimated 400 students had answered the questionnaire and it was hoped that the concept of responsible drinking would outlast the weekend.

The two initial test runs were a success. Throughout the rest of the semester, the department attempted to gain more community insight from other groups, especially the student body. They held a radio talk show and attempted to hold chat sessions in the Residence Halls. Unfortunately, few, if any, students showed up to give insights. In fact, when getting respondents for the behavioral survey, the department bribed students with candy or soda just to persuade them to answer the questionnaire. Fortunately, a task force on alcohol and drug usage on campus was on

going. This task force consisted of students, faculty and staff members and did give us some insight into what this select group thought.

A final issue that had been overlooked in the previous analysis of the behavioral survey was that students indicated that there was a lack of activities during weekend nights, the most problematic time. Except for occasional non-alcoholic dances and some late-night intramural athletics, no University sponsored programming occurred. If a student was of legal drinking age, they could go to the Pub until it closed at 1 a.m. (this establishment does sell alcohol, however as previously noted, does encourage responsible drinking). If a student was underage, all University activities ceased by 10 p.m.

By the start of the 1999 spring semester, the department achieved positive results regarding targeted education and had shared them with other administrators. Also discussed was the possibility that a lack of alternative activities was indirectly causing many of our alcohol related problems. Based upon these two insights, a plan of action for the upcoming semester was formulated.

The plan, called the "Think Before you Drink" project was a directed alternative to drinking and alcohol abuse. The department directed its efforts at the days, times and places that were most problematic. At the same time it offered healthy choices to alcohol abuse. By combining these two issues into a single event offered every weekend that school was in session, the department hoped to curb dangerous drinking behaviors. The following goals were identified:

To decrease alcohol related disturbances within the residence halls;

To increase awareness of irresponsible drinking and their effects on health and society; and

To increase the quality of life for the student population.

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In order to achieve our goals, the department identified these objectives:

To coordinate with campus groups and departments to form collaborative partnerships that will address the problem;

To decrease the number of incidents reported to the police and Residence Life;

To decrease the number of officer hours spent on alcohol incidents;

To decrease the number of underage drinking offenses;

To decrease the frequency of repeat offenders; and

To increase awareness about alcohol abuse in the student population.

Thus the department began a semester-long effort of healthy choices. Community partners in this effort consisted of the Student Activities Department, Athletics, Residence Life and the Department of Family and Youth Services that provided grant money. Together, they sponsored full length, feature movies and movie-a-thons, intramural athletics, karaoke club, a "creative dating" entertainer-lecturer, swing dancing instruction and finally a barbeque given during the most alcohol prone event of the spring semester, "All Campus Day." All of the events were timed to coincide with heavy alcohol consumption. In addition to the activity itself, the department provided free pizza to help buffer any alcohol that participants may have consumed.

Additionally, during some of the activities, alcohol education and awareness were mixed with the "fun" elements. For example, four "fatal vision" goggles were used to show the lack of motor skills and coordination when intoxicated.

Preliminary numbers seemed to indicate a decrease in alcohol related incidents. However, this was tempered with the knowledge that as the winter ends and spring begins, the frequency of alcohol related disturbances rises. All Campus

Day provided a real test of the project's effectiveness. This particular day has been affectionately renamed by the students as "All Case Day" because special honors are supposed to be bestowed upon anyone who can drink a case of beer within the 24-hour day. By now, the department was sold on the success of targeted diversions. The department reviewed past All Campus Days and discovered that the majority of the problems occurred in one area between 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. Based upon this information, a barbeque was held from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. In addition to free food and drink, music and games went on throughout the day, and prizes were given away. Scattered throughout the day alcohol related facts were read over the loudspeakers.

Despite having two more alcohol related incidents in 1999 than in 1998 (four in 1999), "All Campus Day 1.999" was still considered a success as there were no reported incidents during the critical time period. Further, all years from 1997 through 2000 were included, it appears that 1998 was an anomaly, and 1999 could be considered successful when compared to 1997 and 2000.

Assessment: Was it Successful

Success of the "Think Before you Drink" Project consisted of an evaluation that measured two separate entities relating to the stated goals and objectives. The first portion compared resident student's attitudes and behaviors in order to determine whether perceptions had changed over the course of the two semesters. The second half of the evaluation compared actual police department statistics gathered from the spring 1999 semester with the spring 1998 semester,

These statistics reflected the number of alcohol related incidents reported to the department, number of repeat offenders, number of police officer hours spent on alcohol related problems, number of underage drinking incidents, as well as demographic data such as who, where and when the incidents were occurring. A specific question relating to the number of individuals who had been negatively impacted by alcohol related incidents was meant to determine the quality of life with-

in the residence halls. The following results were found:

The number of incidents reported to the police were 25 percent less;

The number of officer hours spent on alcohol violations was 23 percent less;

The Number of repeat offenders lwas 84.6 percent less; and

The number of underage drinking incidents was 47 percent less.

Unfortunately, there were some difficulties with gathering some of the data. In particular, Residence Life staff did not keep accurate data on incidents reported to them, thus we were unable to determine if this portion of the project was successful or not. In talking with Residence Life staff, they did "feel" that there was a decrease in alcohol related problems.

As for coordinating with other campus groups and departments to form collaborative partnerships, coordination was made with several groups, however their level of collaboration was not necessarily as equal partners. As a whole they appeared content to let the department coordinate the project while they followed along.

Despite the minor areas that could not be quantified, the project was a resounding success. In all of the quantifiable areas, the decrease was significant.

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To submit a POP project for publication in an upcoming issue of *Problem Solving Quarterly* contact David Edelson at dedelson@policeforum.org.

Due to space constraints not all submissions can be printed.

PERF reserves the right to edit all submissions for content and clarity.

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greater emotional demands on its practitioners nor is more dependent on good morale. That morale is intimately tied to perceived levels of public support.

In an era of global communications and the 24-hour news cycle, there is no margin for error in policing. The sins of one agency, real or merely alleged, are visited on all. That's not going to change. We leaders, if we are going to be leaders, cannot model nor wallow in self-pity.

Our obligation, to our officers and our communities remains to speak that "truth" to power as we continue to strive to maintain the trust necessary to police effectively. It will be even more important in the future, as our mission grows increasingly complex as we assist the nation with its continuing evolution into an extraordinarily multi-cultural society.

Here are some aspects of our truth that I submit for your consideration:

The police are in a unique position to both respond to and report on the evolving social challenges facing our nation. We must not abandon our community-based strategies in the face of criticism but redouble them.

The police as an institution have historically served many purposes. As emerging communities have advanced in society they have sought to make policing more responsive to their priorities, entered policing to secure social mobility, and criticized policing to correct perceived abuses and to build constituencies of interest. These purpose are all valid and our officers must be made aware of and not threatened by any of them. We must not resist real reform or the emergence of new constituencies. But once those constituencies have been built and have learned how to access political power, the ongoing challenges of the disadvantaged will still require police and community collaborations.

Police idealism is a form of social capital. Our entire society has a stake in its maintenance and development. Our sons and daughters need to believe it is a noble

calling. As the news media performs its proper function of reporting the shortcomings of police institutions attention must be paid to a crucial audience: potential recruits, especially those from minority communities.

One of the great benefits of the community policing movement was on police officer attitudes. Traditional reactive police strategies fostered police cynicism because the police were isolated from the community. Community policing, because it was dependent on partnership, broke down the isolation of the police subculture. It would be a great tragedy if our new generations of officers drew back defensively from their communities into an alienated and defensive posture. Police leadership must work to prevent it but cannot do it alone.

It's not about the data. Well-intentioned legislators across the nation are responding to the legitimate demands of their constituents for mandatory "data collection" on police practices. In the "zero sum" world of politics, where there must be "winners" and "losers" this seems like an easy "win." But as Benjamin Disraeli said over 100 years ago, there are three kinds of lies: "lies, damnable lies, and statistics,"

Community trust won't come from numbers but from engagement. Police must confront concerns about biased policing because there are concerns, not because there are numbers. We will never data our way into the public trust. But much anguish will arise from imperfectly collected data for which social science lacks the tools to explain or adequately interpret. Correlation is not causation. One cannot prove a negative. The police will never be able to prove they are unbiased as bias can hide in the under-enforcement of the law as easily as in its over-enforcement.

Disadvantaged communities must not suffer for the good intentions of policy makers. Current pending legislation in congress would infer bias from any police tactic that has an "adverse impact" on any minority group. Yet those of us who police diverse communities and take pride in responding to the concerns and priorities of those communities are most vulnerable

to such negative statutory inferences. If we truly respond to the priorities of the disadvantaged populations will do so at the cost of generating data that can be used against us to prove, not responsiveness, but "adverse impact." Worse still, those same legislative proposals would withdraw all federal law enforcement funding from those very same communities who need them the most while subjecting their protectors to expensive litigation to prove they aren't biased.

Every progressive chief and sheriff I know wants to engage their communities in both problem solving and trust building. In the midst of this current "crisis in confidence" many of us still see opportunity for progress. I know most of the practitioners in this room. Every one of them is a modern manager predisposed to respond to the priorities and perceptions of their constituents.

I am put in mind of one of the tenants of "total quality management": Manage on the behavior of the 95 percent of people who are trying to fulfill the mission and not the 5 percent who cause problems. Deal with that 5 percent promptly and fairly. I would urge or policy makers to remember that same admonition when they are tempted to enact "one size fits all" responses to complaints about law enforcement.

One of the truths I remember being spoken to power many years ago was that charge "if you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem." The dramatic improvements in both the quality of American law enforcement and the quality of urban American life are because many dedicated people inside and outside of policing committed themselves to institutional reform and societal improvement. So much has been done. So many of us are willing to do more. Over the next two days and, hopefully, in future sessions building on our work here, those of you who have power over us will be open to the collective wisdom and experience of the law enforcement executives gathered here. We have much to share.

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POP 2001
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Join PERF at the 12th Annual International Problem-Oriented Policing Conference.

**December 5-8, 2001
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Register online at www.policeforum.org

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Historic community located 40 miles south of Nashville in the middle Tennessee area. Current population of 33,000 expected to significantly increase due to annexation and development. Columbia is a diverse community and serves as the educational, medical and commercial hub of Maury County.

Operates under Council-Manager form of government. Voters in each of the five wards elect a council member. The Mayor and Vice Mayor are elected at large. All serve four year staggered terms. Appointed by and reports directly to professional city manager who directs the delivery of all municipal services and implements council policies. Former Chief of Police retired after 30 years of service with the City. Department has 80 sworn officers and 9 civilian employees and \$5.1 million annual budget. The department receives approximately 25,000 calls for service annually.

Desire bachelor's degree in criminal justice/law enforcement or related field; advanced degree or law enforcement training through FBI-NA/LEEDS/PERF/similar programs highly desirable. Ten years progressively responsible experience in police management and supervision; strong leadership abilities; visionary style; ability to form strong partnerships with the community. Candidates must be Tennessee POST certified or certified within 1 year of appointment, Tennessee open disclosure laws may allow for release of candidate information at any stage in the process. Initial review of candidates Nov. 30, 2001, with interviews anticipated in December.

Send resume and current salary information to

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707 N. Main Street
Columbia, TN 38401
kcollier@columbiatn.com. EOE.

Police Chief: Miamisburg, Ohio

Miamisburg, situated eight miles south of Dayton (metro area pop. approx. 900,000) in the Miami Valley, is a full-service suburban city with a population of approximately 20,000. Nestled along the Great Miami River and adjacent to Interstate 75, Miamisburg boasts "modern living and historic charm." With a growing economic base and commercial and high tech development, the City retains its small town charm with an historic downtown and a mix of older neighborhoods and newer housing developments. Abundant recreational opportunities, a full-service hospital and excellent public schools contribute to a high quality of life.

Miamisburg has enjoyed stable city and police administration—the Police Chief, promoted from the ranks, is retiring after 13 years as chief. Under the city's Council-Manager form of government the Police Chief is appointed by and reports to the City Manager. The police department's 39 sworn officers and 14 civilian employees provide a range of law enforcement services, with an emphasis on community policing programs. The department has a budget of \$3.8 million. Recent capital projects include completion of a state-of-the-art communications center with an 800 MHz radio system; cruisers equipped with MDT's; and renovation and expansion of the police department facility.

A Bachelor's degree and five years of increasingly responsible law enforcement experience including three years of command-level responsibility are required. A Master's degree, advanced police management/leadership training and labor-management experience are preferred. The successful candidate will demonstrate a solid record of forging community partnerships and improving organizational performance. The position offers a competitive salary range and benefits.

PERF (www.policeforum.org) is assisting the City with the selection process. There is additional information at www.mvcc.net/Miamisburg, where you will find related links.

To apply, send a resume and a one-page cover letter addressed to PERF summarizing your interest and qualifications by November 19, 2001 to: Police Executive Research Forum Attention:

Miamisburg Search
1 120 Connecticut Ave., NW
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Please submit formal applications by Dec. 28, 2001 to

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cal date for American policing. It will mark a turning point when the necessity of true federal and local law enforcement collaboration became critical. It will mark the beginning of an era when it became clear that local law enforcement agencies play a critical role in ensuring our national security. And it will mark a time of which we can be proud because police officers rose to the challenge, improvising when contingency plans were rendered obsolete, and confronted unprecedented danger with courage.

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I, as are my colleagues, am proud of my calling but not blind to its blemishes nor deaf to its critics. No public institution has changed as much, as rapidly or more for the better than law enforcement. But it has not been "enough" nor will it ever be. We are privileged to police a society that will always expect us to do "more" to be "better" and "fairer" and to have ever-higher standard of integrity. We will be expected to be more dignified, more restrained, more honorable and more responsive than any other institution. Americans are demanding people. We owe them, our forebearers and our children "more" and "better." This must serve as our inspiration. And our legacy.

Ways to Contribute to *Subject to Debate*

Help PERF continue to make **Subject to Debate** a vehicle for the latest issues in progressive policing. PERF members and readers are once again reminded to send articles and items of interest for PERF to consider publishing in this newsletter. PERF welcomes the following submissions:

- ◆ **Original Articles.** Articles should be relatively short (800—1,200 words) and focus on a current issue of interest for progressive police professionals. PERF seeks articles that give a fresh perspective on these issues, and that offer practical, sound ideas for police professionals to institute in their own agencies. Articles will be reviewed for content, interest to PERF readers and writing quality.
- **Reader Responses.** Send iii responses to articles that have appeared. Let your voice be heard on these important issues. These articles should be from 200—500 words in length.
- **Bulletin Board Items.** Send in notices of upcoming conferences, new publications or other short information items to be shared in the Bulletin Board section.
- ◆ **Employment Opportunities.** PERF will publish employment advertisements that are relevant for PERF members as space allows. These advertisements are published free of charge as a service to members,

The deadline for all material is the 15th of the month prior to publication. Send submissions to David Edelson at dedelson@policeforum.org or by fax to 202/466-7826.

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