

# Center for Officer Safety and Wellness

International Association of Chiefs of Police



## Officer Safety Column:

### Long-Term Declines in Firearms-Related Deaths and Injuries for Officers and the Public



Falling crime rates in New York City have received a great deal of attention from the media and from academics—especially those crime rates from the 1990s. However, a closely related area that has received much less attention is the large, long-term reductions in firearms discharges by police, with apparent flow on effects to injuries and fatalities. A 2011 article in the *New York Times* described “the steep decline in shootings by the police in recent decades,” noting that 2010 data revealed record lows.<sup>1</sup>

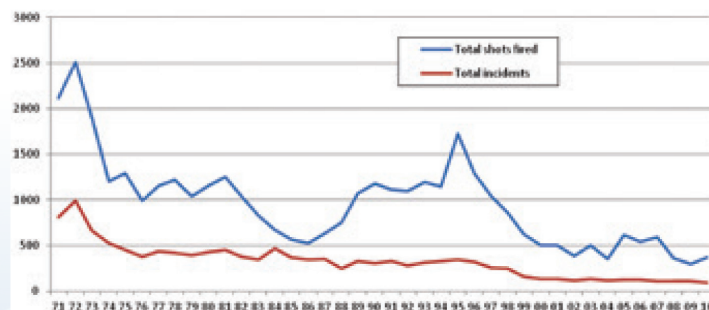
Data in the New York City Police Department’s (NYPD’s) annual firearms discharge report include the numbers of shots fired, injuries and fatalities, and associated demographic data. Time-series data in the figure show a fluctuating but overall downward trend in total shots fired, from a peak of 2,510 in 1972 to an average of 343 in the last three years of reporting (2008 through 2010). This represents an 86.3 percent reduction. Regarding total incidents where one or more shots were fired, data show a decline of 89.8 percent from a peak of 994 in 1972 to an average of 101 during the last three years of reporting.

What is interesting is the apparent effect of the reduced discharges on injuries and fatalities. The number of persons shot and injured by police declined from a peak of 221 in 1971 to an average of 18 in the last three years of reporting. In addition, the number of persons shot and killed declined from a peak of 93 in 1971 to an average of 11 in the last three years of reporting. These data represent declines of 91.8 percent and 88.1 percent, respectively.

What is then particularly interesting is the apparent win-win situation for both citizens and the police. The number of officers shot and injured peaked in 1973 at 50 and then declined by 96.8 percent to an average of 1 or 2 per year from 2008 through 2010. The number of officers shot and killed peaked in 1971 at 12 and then declined by 100 percent to 0 in the last three years of reporting.

The NYPD attributes these remarkable reductions in large part to Standard Operating Procedure 9, section 69, introduced in 1969, which involves documenting shooting incidents for the purpose of informing prevention efforts.<sup>2</sup> The reductions have also been associated with the influence of tightened rules, specifically introduced in 1972. These rules limited justifiable deadly force, mandated investigations of all firearms discharges, and required officers be disciplined for breaches of the guidelines.<sup>3</sup>

Police shootings and associated fatalities and injuries remain major problems worldwide. A more in-depth examination of the NYPD experience may reveal lessons that will have implications beyond the walls of the agency. In the interim, it will be good to see just how far the NYPD can push these positive statistics.



NYPD, Total Shots Fired and Total Incidents, 1971-2010

Source: New York City Police Department, Annual Firearms Discharge Report 2010.

For additional information regarding 2010 NYPD firearm discharge statistics, please visit [http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/downloads/pdf/analysis\\_and\\_planning/afdr\\_20111116.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/downloads/pdf/analysis_and_planning/afdr_20111116.pdf) (accessed August 15, 2012).

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