Duluth Police Department

Speed and Alcohol In Brief

Peak Performance

By emphasizing performance management, the Duluth Police Department has re-engaged officers, encouraged traffic enforcement and reduced traffic fatalities from speed and alcohol.

Every year, the Minnesota Department of Public Safety (MDPS) releases its list of the state's 13 most dangerous counties for impaired driving. In 2010, St. Louis County was ranked No. 2 on the list with 26 fatalities and 55 serious injuries as a result of alcohol-related crashes.

"Unfortunantely, our county was identified as one of the top ... deadliest counties for [alcohol-related] severe injuries and fatalities," says Lt. Leigh Wright, West Area commander for the Duluth Police Department (DPD) in Duluth, Minn., St. Louis County's largest city. "You don't want to make the top [13] when it comes to that type of activity."

The rankings served as a wake-up call for the department. With the release of the data, they recognized that traffic enforcement in Duluth was not a priority of the organization and enforcement efforts had become sporadic at best.

"In the 1950s, '60s and '70s we had an organized traffic bureau, but that went away in the '80s," explains Mike Tusken, deputy chief of DPD's Duluth Patrol Division. "After that, patrol officers just did whatever they felt was necessary in traffic enforcement, up to and including nothing at all. And I mean literally nothing. There were some officers who [hadn't made traffic stops in years]."

"It's common knowledge in law enforcement that if you have excessive speed and impaired drivers, you're going to have more crashes, more injuries and more deaths." — Deputy Chief Mike Tusken

By tracking not only traffic incidents but also the productivity of the officers policing them, Lt. Leigh Wright in only two years' time transformed the Lake Superior Traffic Enforcement Team into an efficient operation whose efforts are successfully reducing speed- and alcohol-related fatalities in and around Duluth.

Meanwhile, alcohol-related traffic fatalities persisted, totaling 1,200 statewide from 2009 until 2011, the most recent three-year period for which data are available. Of those deaths, MDPS reports illegal or unsafe speed was a factor in 52 percent, emphasizing the important role that speed enforcement plays in reducing DUI deaths.

"It's common knowledge in law enforcement that if you have excessive speed and impaired drivers, you're going to have more crashes, more injuries and more deaths," Tusken says. Unfortunantly, common knowledge was not enough to stop traffic fatalities in Duluth. The time had come, therefore, to turn knowledge into action.

Strategy: Performance Management

Long neglected, traffic enforcement re-emerged as a major priority for DPD in 2010, when MDPS named St. Louis County to its watch list. That same year, DPD

adopted a CompStat system for collecting, tracking and reporting law enforcement data.

Around the same time, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) published a series of case studies proving the impact of Data-Driven Approaches to Crime and Traffic Safety (DDACTS), a place-based model of policing introduced in 2008 to reduce crime and crashes simultaneously. Together, CompStat and DDACTS inspired a data- and location-based approach to traffic enforcement in Duluth, the core of which is performance management.

"Starting with CompStat, we started to track more [data] about who did what, when, where and how consistently," Tusken says.

The increased oversight extended to the Lake Superior Traffic Enforcement Team, a coalition of local law enforcement agencies that is part of Minnesota Toward Zero Deaths (TZD), a traffic safety program launched in 2003 with the goal of reducing traffic crashes, injuries and deaths on Minnesota roads. The team—comprising DPD, which leads the coalition, and five other police departments—receives federal funding for paying overtime to officers who volunteer for special TZD patrols, focusing on speeding and impaired driving. Unfortunately, it was not getting results.

"The state had been very unhappy with the way this project was going for a number of years and they were ready to take the [grant] money away," says Wright, who was appointed by Tusken to manage the team in 2010.

Prior to Wright's appointment, the program lacked direct oversight. It was unfocused, uncoordinated and, as a result, largely ineffective. When Wright joined the team in 2010, however, she applied to it the same data-based strategies DPD was integrating elsewhere. As previously indicated, a major focus was performance management: By tracking not only traffic incidents but also the productivity of the officers policing them, Wright in only two years' time trans-

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Success Factors

In 2012, DPD made 273 DUI arrests, down 38 percent from 441 in 2009. Of those, 17 stemmed from speed stops, down 46 percent from 32 in 2009. On first glance, it might appear that DPD was enforcing traffic laws less. On the contrary, it made 14,892 traffic stops and issued 1,479 speed citations in 2012, up 26.4 percent and 92.3 percent, respectively, from 11,780 and 769 in 2009. The decline in DUIs, therefore, does not reflect a drop in enforcement, but rather a change in driver behaviors.

"Your lights flashing only changes behavior for people immediately; they'll speed up to 70 or 80 mph again as soon as you're gone," Tusken says. "DDACTS showed a direct correlation between high-visibility law enforcement and reduction of crashes and crime … It reinforced for us that having small, manageable areas of heavy enforcement would change behavior [in the long term]."

Using DDACTS principles, the Lake Superior Traffic Enforcement Team has reduced speed- and alcohol-related fatalities by increasing speed- and alcohol-related enforcement. According to Tusken and Wright, the latter has been achieved with the help of the following critical success factors:

• Performance benchmarking: DPD uses CompStat to track and report officers' performance on a weekly basis. For instance, the department tracks how many narrative reports officers complete, how many traffic stops they make, how many arrests they make and how many citations they issue. Although Minnesota law forbids quotas, taken in aggregate the data allow for organizational benchmarking against a median so officers can compare their performance to that of their peers and set appropriate personal goals. As further motivation, the department recognizes every week the three officers who make the most traffic stops. "What we measure, we do well," Tusken says. "If your goals are to reduce impaired driving and speeding, and ultimately crashes and fatalities, you have to have some measurement of what your officers do or don't do [around] traffic enforcement." In the case of TZD patrols, which take place several evenings a month, the data are available the following morning for review by Wright, who requires officers to make at least three contacts every hour. Because officers who consistently under-perform on TZD patrols are excluded from future participation, the result is helping her assemble a best-in-class team of traffic enforcers.

> Teamwork among the six agencies that make up the Lake Superior Traffic Enforcement Team is key, according to Wright, who says inter-agency collaboration allows police departments to pool their resources in order to develop traffic patrols that are larger, more visible and therefore more effective.

• Leadership: DPD's traffic enforcement efforts prior to 2010—or lack thereof—demonstrate the importance of leadership. "When you [as a leader] set a goal, people will engage and become part of the solution," Tusken says. "[Officers] have to think that what they're doing is meaningful. We've accomplished that by setting a mission and explaining why it's important … When we tell our officers that [speed and alcohol enforcement] is a priority, we focus our people's efforts on those behaviors." Leadership's impact is equally evident on the Lake Superior Traffic Enforcement Team, where appointing a leader—Wright—to organize and deploy resources, set and communicate expectations, and hold people accountable has yielded substantial benefits.

• High-visibility enforcement: The Lake Superior Traffic Enforcement Team has embraced a policy of high-visibility enforcement. In fact, the terms of its grant funding stipulate that 50 percent of the team's enforcement must be high-visibility; under Wright's direction, it's 99 percent. "We'll put six or seven squad

cars—maybe 10—in a small area, and we'll stop [all violations in that area]," Wright explains, adding that visibility is further enhanced by public outreach via programmable message signs. "When you have 10 squads in a specific area, and you're making all these traffic stops, people see that."

Over time—as DPD's aforementioned speed and DUI data show—the result is behavioral change among drivers. "We all know the local speed traps in our communities; if you're coming through that area, you always reduce your speed before you get there, even if there's no one else on the road," Tusken says. "'Every time I go by there, somebody is pulled over, so I always go slow through here.' You hear people say things like that. You're conditioning people's behavior."

• Location-based deployment: Wright uses CompStat data to deploy the Lake Superior Traffic Enforcement Team strategically to so-called "hot spots."

"Before [I joined the team] officers would just hit the streets," Wright explains. "Now they get a focused, concentrated area where they're going to work on speed and DUI, based on prior data."

Because high visibility is a major priority, the team also focuses TZD patrols in areas of high opportunity based on special events, such as concerts and festivals. Always, however, the goal is optimizing geography as much as it is manpower. "If traffic is low where we're at, we'll move as a group to another area of the city that's higher-visibility," Wright says.

• Inter-agency collaboration: Teamwork among the six agencies that make up the Lake Superior Traffic Enforcement Team is key, according to Wright, who says inter-agency collaboration allows police departments to pool their resources in order to develop traffic patrols that are larger, more visible and therefore more effective. "It allows us to have more officers working together in a given area," Wright explains.

Key Achievements

Since re-establishing traffic enforcement as a priority in 2010, DPD has made significant progress toward reducing speed- and alcohol-related fatalities in Duluth. Traffic crashes, for instance, totaled 2,726 in 2012, down 4.6 percent from 2,858 in 2009. DUI crashes, meanwhile, totaled 75, down 7.4 percent from 81.

The progress, evident in TZD patrols, also extended to the Lake Superior Traffic Enforcement Team: Based on its improved performance, the state nearly doubled its grant funding from $68,000 to $203,000. Previously able to conduct them just a couple times a month, the team now conducts TZD patrols every single weekend.

"Our traffic stops are up, our crashes are down, our speeding and seatbelt tickets are up, we've reduced our traffic deaths and we've reduced our injury crashes," concludes Tusken, who credits DPD's performance management system. "There's no question we've moved the needle."

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